

Plus

The Elgar Society JOURNAL



JANUARY
1994

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Editorial	151
<i>Article</i>	
Elgar and the Class Society - Part II	152
"Elgar's Rondo" - reviews	157
Birthplace News	163
Developments at Broadheath	164
Discovering Elgar Country	165
Random Ramblings...	168
Concert Diary	173
Book Reviews	176
Record Reviews	180
Branch Reports	191
Letters	194
Subscriptions	Back Cover

.....

The Editor does not necessarily agree with the views expressed by contributors nor does the Elgar Society accept responsibility for such views.

.....

The cover portrait is reproduced by kind permission of RADIO TIMES

The Elgar Society Journal

115 MONKHAMS AVENUE, WOODFORD GREEN, ESSEX IG8 0ER
081- 506 0912

EDITORIAL

Vol.8, No.4
January 1994

It has been said of journalists that they never let the truth stand in the way of a good story. A similar temptation must afflict the writer of historical fiction. Inventing characters and setting them in real historical situations (such as Dickens did in *A Tale of Two Cities*) is an acceptable literary or dramatic device; but it is not so easy when writing about real people. If you invent situations or characterisations of your own, you run the risk of producing a distortion or even a caricature. If a dramatist wants us to become seriously involved with the historical personage he is portraying, he is obliged to present a credible characterisation, one which fits the facts.

This, it seems to me, is David Pownall's great problem in *Elgar's Rondo*: after all, there are those still alive who knew Elgar, and there is such an abundance of material that it is possible to know a great deal about him. Pownall claims to have accurately represented the composer, but I am not so sure. I would question his central thesis, which he revealed in a number of interviews. "The writing of the Rondo was a moment of transformation when Elgar could have become another composer, but he drew back from that; he had fulfilled himself. He didn't have the courage and reserves to take him forward to be an essentially modern composer. He wanted to go back into a social life which was already defined. He wanted to diminish from that point onwards. The tragedy of his genius is that he couldn't face the pain and the power of what was in him. Going forward was more bitter and dangerous than staying behind. If he did nothing, he was safer and more comfortable; he could live in a past that was preferable. He had the spirit and genius to do it; he didn't have the constitution. If he had developed the sounds in the Rondo, he would have become a great modern composer, not merely a late Romantic. He would have outgrown his origins and straddled the world".

There are lots of hostages to Elgarian fortune there, and to comment adequately is beyond the scope of this Editorial. But it seems doubtful if Elgar, or any other composer, was capable of being so detached or objective about his own work at the time of its writing. As Anthony Payne said during a discussion on the play immediately after its première, composers write as they feel; they do not consciously "progress". And the critics of the day do not appear to have detected anything really novel or "frightening" in the Rondo. Certainly Ernest Newman recognised that it was "terrible in intensity of black import"; but also spoke of Elgar's "restricted circle of style" in the symphony as a whole. He found a new direction in Elgar two years later when *Falstaff* was produced, a piece which the composer himself in later life considered his finest orchestral work.

Tony Palmer, who chaired the discussion mentioned above, said : "*Elgar's Rondo* is the sort of play to provide a field day for the whingers and nit-pickers - those little creeps called music critics, who will say 'If only Pownall had known Elgar like I knew Elgar', and other such *garbage*". Well, having had my whinge and picked a few nits, I shall say no more, except that I hope those who attend the play knowing little or nothing about Elgar will be drawn to investigate the man and his music for themselves.

GEOFFREY HODGKINS

ELGAR AND THE CLASS SOCIETY

Digby Hague-Holmes

Part II

Elgar's parents realised their son's ambitions were as much social as artistic. Perhaps that is why, in his early years, they tried to engage him in a possible career in law. Right up until the 1880s both law and medicine were still the superior professions for the socially ambitious although these were soon to be overtaken by others such as civil engineers, architects, and scientists. In his booklet *Edward Elgar* Hartley Ramsay writes : "No composer ever looked less the part than Elgar. He once declared that if he had not been a musician he would have been a soldier; and with his "military" bearing and distinctive moustache he could easily be mistaken for one". Even if Elgar had ever seriously intended to embark on a career as a soldier (which is extremely unlikely) he would have soon discovered that right up to the mid-1870s commissioned rank in the Army (as well as senior posts in the Civil Service) were still closed to boys from the middle class¹. In finally choosing music, he would have realised only too well the uphill struggle he would be facing, for the practice of music, at that time, was simply not considered a suitable profession for a gentleman. In the minds of the general public at least, music was associated with the various drinking and Glee Clubs, the rapidly expanding working class brass bands, the variety houses, and the bawdy music halls. In this atmosphere it is not surprising if Elgar almost instinctively sought to distance himself socially from the profession of music; and we can understand his studious efforts as a young orchestral player to avoid being seen carrying his violin case in public. He knew that to become a reputable and recognised composer he had somehow to acquire the status of a "gentleman"; to become like Sullivan, Stanford, and Parry - Establishment figures who had achieved their standing in society through birth, education, accomplishment, and appointment. Elgar once told the violinist, Jelly d'Aranyi, that as a young man "he greatly disliked being introduced as 'Mr Elgar, the composer'. 'Mr Elgar, gentleman', he said, 'would have been

¹ Bradley, Ian : *The English Middle Classes* (Collins, 1982) p.73

enough"². He had other reasons for wanting this introduction; outwardly, to impress those whose support he needed; inwardly, to smooth those turbulent feelings of social inferiority, to establish that inner calm without which he could not compose.

Alice Roberts was socially well above Elgar. After a number of unsatisfactory romantic affairs with younger ladies largely from his own lower middle class background, the prospect of social advancement through marriage to Alice must have been a powerful stimulus to their developing relationship. Their mutual problems are well described, and by choosing to marry in the socially fashionable Brompton Oratory away from provincial gossip, and first setting up home in London, they clearly sought to make a fresh start. In the early years of their life together one has to imagine Alice's gentle but firm influence in weaning her husband away from his social background. There would be no half measures. Alice was incapable of any flexibility or even compromise in her interpretation of what constituted correct social behaviour, which in her case was underpinned by an almost obsessive snobbery. He would have soon learnt what he did not already know of the myriad social conventions which governed one's relationships to people of different classes, from the intricacies of table etiquette to the use of correct vocabulary and the rituals of social calling. If need be, there were many reference manuals to hand in which sections were specifically addressed to "gentlemen". One such reference - *Manners and Rules of Good Society*(1888) - gives us a glimpse of just what was involved:

Don't, however brief your call, wear overcoat or overshoes into the drawing-room. If you are making a short call, carry your hat and cane in your hand, but never an umbrella...Don't attempt to shake hands with everybody present. If host or hostess offers a hand, take it; a bow is sufficient for the rest. Don't in any case offer to shake hands with a lady. The initiative must always come from her. By the same principle don't offer your hand to a person older than yourself, or to anyone whose rank may be supposed to be higher than your own, until he has extended his.

At the start of any marriage, there is always some realignment of past friends to produce a mix for the future mutually acceptable to both partners. But according to Rosa Burley this process was unusually difficult for the Elgars. She writes : "In those years the Elgars were not very happily placed for forming friendships. The rigid ideas of caste which Alice had naturally taken over from her Anglo-Indian father made many of Edward's friends unacceptable to her - she hardly ever visited the old Elgars at their music shop - and a good many of her own friends had cut her for marrying a man who, in their pathetically limited view, was 'unsuitable'"³.

Whilst Alice may have wanted to avoid being seen in public at the Worcester Music Shop, it is evident from the numerous examples in Jerrold Northrop Moore's book *Edward Elgar : Letters of a Lifetime* that she nonetheless conducted a personally warm correspondence with Edward's mother and his sister Helen. And despite Rosa Burley's observations, she soon blended her husband into her own still loyal circle

² MacLeod, Joseph : *The Sisters d'Aranyi* (George Allen & Unwin, 1969) p.118

³ Burley, Rosa & Carruthers, F C : *Edward Elgar; the record of a friendship* (Barrie & Jenkins, 1972) p.93

of friends. One senses something of the impact of all this from his single word diary entry - "Gosh!" - at the prospect of meeting the Honourable Mrs Roper-Curzon in the same year as their marriage. No doubt there were moments of social awkwardness on such occasions. Carice Elgar Blake has left one amusing insight into her father's indifference to some aspects of this social re-education. She observed that her mother had very rigid ideas about how people of gentle birth should hold a pen, yet as a little girl, she had once peeped through the window of her father's study and "was horrified to note that, in his way of holding his pen, there was no sign of observance of the required tenets of gentility"⁴. But, some twenty-five years later, there was to be a very sharp observance of what constituted social "correctness" when Elgar wrote to Alice Stuart-Wortley :

After all I did not dine at the R.A. - I went in, found that they had omitted my O.M. & put me with a crowd of nobodies in the lowest place of all - the bottom table - I see no reason why I should endure insults - I can understand their being offered to me...I left at once and came here (The Athenaeum) and had a herring.⁵

In this gradual transformation to "gentleman" there were to be many changes to Elgar's lifestyle. The quality, cut and fashion of one's clothes were always an immediate indicator of one's standing. He was now to dress more appropriately, in the manner and taste of a country squire. And judging by the immaculate turnout which is evident from most of the available photographs, Elgar fully earned his reputation as a "snappy" dresser. He joined the local golf club. Rosa Burley, however, is somewhat scathing about this move, writing that "golf appealed to him less as a game than as a mark of a certain social status, and that it represented an attempt to live up to his wife's rather exacting standards"⁶. She clearly did not know - as we do today, thanks to W R Mitchell's recent booklet, *Elgar in the Yorkshire Dales* - that he had, in fact, acquired his enthusiasm for golf during his early visits to Dr Charles Buck, long before he had met Alice. But other pursuits - beagling, fishing, hunting, cycling, and kite-flying - all fitted in well to the new image. 'Gentlemen', Elgar would have long noted, engaged in 'sports', not 'games'. One of his later hobbies - heraldry - was particularly popular amongst the upper and middle classes. Heraldry and genealogy were but manifestations of their desire to try and preserve the exclusiveness of their place at the top of society, now increasingly threatened by changing economic and social conditions.

When it came to holidays, no one from the working or lower middle classes ever took a real break, and very few from even the upper middle class would have ventured abroad for that purpose. And yet, from the start of their marriage, the Elgars frequently travelled on the Continent - usually first-class, although they could ill afford it. Home ownership was the one indisputable sign of a secure middle classness, but it was not until 1912 that they were able to purchase their first house. In the interim, they merely rented various residences, although financial limitations

⁴ Young, Percy M : *Alice Elgar : Enigma of a Victorian Lady* (Dobson, 1978) p.137

⁵ Moore, J N : *Edward Elgar : the Windflower Letters* (O U P, 1989) p.117

⁶ Burley & Carruthers p.62

did not inhibit them from additionally renting a second house, Birchwood Lodge, in the early years. But despite these apparent deviations from class expectations, the Elgars totally conformed to a fundamental requirement - to keep up appearances, and make the best status-enhancing display out of however much (or little) they had. The "little" for them, of course, was the persistent shortage of money. Nonetheless, like all respectable gentlemen of that time, Elgar would never have borrowed money, nor taken credit, to make ends meet. Even so, he must have felt very keenly his apparent inability to fulfil what was a basic obligation upon him as a "gentleman"; to provide properly for his wife and child. But unlike most of his professional contemporaries, Elgar was self-employed, worked from home, and never received a regular salary or pension, and was thus reduced at times to living entirely on Alice's slender resources, or on the generosity of their friends.

There appears to be a connotation between all these changes in Elgar's social life and his music. Prior to his marriage, he had composed little of major significance. Shortly afterwards he produced the concert overture *Froissart* - the first orchestral work to be stamped with that distinctive Elgarian style. His pursuit of gentility may be evident in his choice of subjects for other works at this particular period of his career. *The Black Knight*, *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* are all drawn from historical and romantic tales, centred around chivalry and heroism, led by figures who were the "aristocrats" of their times, "lifting their lances on high". Within ten years of marriage, he had produced his first acknowledged masterpiece, the *Enigma Variations*. Inasmuch as these variations can truly be said to faithfully depict all those "friends pictured within", then the whole work might be viewed as a social commentary on Elgar's new world. It is interesting to note that close and long-standing friends from his pre-marriage days - such as Hubert Leicester and Dr Charles Buck - are not included. To that extent, perhaps the work can also be seen as representing a further break with the past, whilst setting the seal on Elgar's now fulfilled social aspirations and his creative activities. Whether one was a precondition of the other, we shall never know.

From this happy fusion of the outward to the inner Elgar, he could now develop fresh avenues within society for patronage and recognition. From his youth he had been brought up to revere the institution of monarchy, and he was always seeking royal sponsorship of his work as a matter of deliberate policy. He had long appreciated that this was the way to obtain immediate public interest, as well as helping to raise the status of music in the country to that enjoyed by painters, writers and performers. At the same time, royal patronage brought the personal honours which underlined his social standing. They also brought other satisfactions. As Carice commented at the news of his knighthood in 1904, "it puts mother back where she was before they were married". The deference, and the care of the niceties of protocol with which he approached all matters concerning the Court, show up very clearly in all the correspondence to and fro. In the early days his criticism of the person of the Monarch was understandably muted. He doesn't seem, for example, to have left any recorded comments on the scandalous behaviour of King Edward VII, despite casting aspersions on others less regal for similar activities. But by the twenties he had become more outspoken, telling Siegfried Sassoon, "We all know

that the King and Queen are incapable of appreciating anything artistic"⁷, and later, in a letter to Alice Stuart-Wortley, he was describing the whole Court as "irredeemably vulgar!"⁸ But such outbursts were isolated. All his life Elgar had a deeply-rooted respect for all institutional authority, and for the obligations of that authority, for these had been the fundamentals which had determined the social behaviour of the world in which he had grown up.

His political beliefs, likewise, reflected these same values. From his home background he had absorbed the solid virtues of conservatism, and their place in the notion of "respectability". He abhorred all forms of radicalism and came to detest the rise of socialism. By the turn of the century there were many new occupational groups claiming, and securing, middle class status; trade unions were now mobilising the working classes into a new political force. To someone as thin-skinned as Elgar, it seemed as if the whole social order was now to be overthrown. In 1905 he was invited to become Mayor of Hereford, and a year later, he seriously considered offering himself as the Unionist candidate in a by-election at Worcester. He even went as far as to invite his old friend Hubert Leicester to find out "how the land lies"⁹. His immediate motive may have been to "escape" from the pressures of completing *The Kingdom*, but he was probably still smarting from the outcome of the General Election early in 1906, when the Liberals had swept to power, and twenty-nine Labour MPs of working class origin had been returned for the first time. Perhaps he was superficially attracted to the idea of a political career, for the secure social standing and financial independence it might bring. But in finally declining both opportunities he was surely acknowledging his own lack of deep political commitment, as well as a distaste for the rough and tumble of party politics.

In later years, a snobbery which was never far below the surface seems to have unduly influenced the Elgars' actions. After the prestigious Order of Merit, Alice was privately hoping for the Nobel Peace Prize. The purchase of Severn House enabled them to move in London society and establish new contacts and friends. Later on, Elgar himself lobbied for a peerage. And yet the social unease remained. There is the well-known story of his declining an important dinner invitation, advising his hostess that "you will not wish your table to be disgraced by the son of a piano-tuner". Sadly he still could not understand or accept that nobody cared about such matters any more, except himself. In 1924 he successfully lobbied for the post of Master of the King's Musick. This had to be the supreme accolade, for that title blended in a unique way all his royal, professional and social aspirations. But others were less accommodating. In 1930 Professor Dent of Cambridge published an astonishing critique, describing Elgar's music as "too emotional and not quite free from vulgarity". How that particular word must have rankled! His mind must have gone back to those early years, and his struggle to emancipate himself from the class disparagement of being "commonplace" and "vulgar". And how he had succeeded! Even if he had never really earned enough money to secure that complete

⁷ Kennedy, Michael : *Portrait of Elgar* (O U P, 2nd.edn, 1982) p.305

⁸ Moore, J N, op.cit. p.290

⁹ Moore, J N : *Edward Elgar : Letters of a Lifetime* (O U P, 1990) p.174

independence he yearned for, and to which every "respectable" gentleman had every right to aspire. But at the end of his life it is probable that it was his outward transformation to "gentleman-artist" which gave him more inner satisfaction than most in his troubled life, for it was so closely allied to his monumental creative achievements.

"ELGAR'S RONDO"

Royal Shakespeare Company

Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Elgar's Rondo completes David Pownall's composer-play trilogy that began sixteen years ago with a dramatization of the connection between Carlo Gesualdo and Peter Warlock in *Music to Murder By* and moved on to *Masterclass*, in which Shostakovich and Prokofiev do battle with Stalin.

Pownall divides the action of his two-and-a-half hour exploration of the dark side of the moon of Sir Edward Elgar into two allegedly bleak moments in the composer's life : the immediate aftermath of the first performance of the *E flat Symphony* in May 1911, and the moment in 1918 when Elgar began work on the *Cello Concerto*.

Alec McCowen, playing Elgar, heads a cast of characters that will be familiar to Elgarians : the two Alices, Jaeger, Schuster, Shaw, even Mark the curmudgeon of a handyman at Brinkwells.

The play has something for everyone. Seekers after an intelligent attempt to shed light on Elgar's creative life should come away satisfied that Pownall's probing makes good theatre, an experience much enhanced by McCowen's admirable portrayal of the composer. Alternatively, Elgarians who come to cavil will not be disappointed.

Each camp will have its champions among the reviewers. The yea-sayers will happily endorse Adam Lively's view that "David Pownall has written a masterpiece, and Alec McCowen's mesmerising portrayal of Elgar catches each fleeting facet of the man's character..." The nay-sayers will share Charles Spencer's conclusion that *Elgar's Rondo* is "thin and inconsequential stuff"; they can cite Nicholas de Jongh's view that "Alec McCowen, who tends these days to lend his characters an air of acerbic primness and keep them drenched in *froideur*, presents Elgar as a man mysteriously dressed in melancholia..."

Pownall, a 55-year-old Liverpoolian, says he became intrigued by Elgar while writing *My Father's House*, his play about the Chamberlain family, the research for which led Pownall to look closely at the effect of Elgar's inaugural Birmingham University lecture on Neville Chamberlain, who was in the audience. Pownall's

interest in Elgar deepened when he met and married the daughter of a Worcestershire apple-growing family. He claims to have listened to all of Elgar's major works before reading any biographical and analytical material. He tells how he moved along quite freely from opus to opus until he was stunned rigid by the *Second Symphony's* third movement. After that, "the more I got involved with Elgar's music, the more I realised what a torment he suffered as a result of it", Pownall told Richard Morrison of *The Times*. "And the torment became associated in my mind with the torment of Elgar's times, that huge destruction and disruption of the first world war. So I have tried not only to portray Elgar's state of mind, but also put England itself on the stage. Particularly the super-myths of Edwardian England".

It is arguable that Pownall exaggerates the doubt and disillusion in Elgar's life. Ivor Atkins tells us that the supper the Elgars gave after the *Second Symphony's* first performance was a jolly occasion. The fact that the hall was only partly full could have been explained by the effect of the unusually warm weather on boiled shirts, and by the effect of unusually high ticket prices on the ranks of dedicated Elgarophiles. Perhaps Elgar's often-quoted "stuffed pigs" remark to W H Reed was never meant to be more than an expression of offhand irritation. Perhaps the Rondo's trio section was never meant to express more than the banging and thumping in the brain of a man with a migraine. If so, Pownall's critics might be right to conclude that the play is a heavy-handed inquisition into Elgar's "moody soul".

I believe the weight of evidence amply justifies Pownall's approach. Consider the concluding paragraph of that magisterial obituary, written by contemporaries who knew Elgar well, that appeared in the April 1934 issue of *The Musical Times* :

He was not a happy man. His work taxed him body and soul...and its burden was not lightened by his constant and perverse belief that the hand of the world was against him. Perhaps it was in self-confession that he wrote at the head of one of his works : 'Rarely, rarely comest thou, spirit of delight'

The producers of *Elgar's Rondo* hope to move the play from the Swan to the Barbican, though they could not confirm definite plans at the time of writing. Meanwhile, David Pownall has gone on to his next work - a radio play scheduled to be broadcast on Radio 3 sometime on 10 March. Its title : *Elgar's Third*.

Arthur Reynolds

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID ABOUT *ELGAR'S RONDO*...

The rondo of the title is the third movement of Elgar's *Second Symphony*. The composer said it represented a man with high fever. Others, Pownall included, have found intimations of doom in its beatings and bangings...Indeed, it can still shock those who think of Elgar as a yeomanly chap who set roast beef to music. One of Pownall's aims is to disabuse such sentimentalists. But another is to suggest



Alec McCowen as Elgar in David Pownall's "Elgar's Rondo" at the Swan Theatre, Stratford 1993 (photo © Royal Shakespeare Company)

that the rondo was a creative crossroads for Elgar. He could have continued up the perilous-looking track to the left, expressing his own fears and the world's terrors through music. Instead, he retreated down the cul-de-sac to the right,funking the challenge or not fully embracing it. I cannot comment on the justice of this accusation, though I suspect it is over-simple. But I can report that it does not generate much dramatic excitement...

...the main encounter is between Alec McCowen's glum Elgar and his conscience as it is quaintly embodied by John Carlisle, playing the accusing ghost of his late publisher.

This is pretty plonking stuff. Carlisle tells McCowen that "it's the first time you've broken out of the chrysalis, and what a splendid butterfly you make"; McCowen tells Carlisle the rondo "will take me places I shouldn't go"...The scene ends, not before time, with the sound of the rondo itself and the sight of blood-stained nurses shepherding blinded squaddies round the stage.

Perhaps the play should have ended with this cheapish climax, for Pownall has little of moment to add...The artistic issues get cloudier without, I fear, getting much deeper. But at least Di Trevis's production lets us see plenty of McCowen. With his mix of the crabby, creamy and despairing, not to mention his fine moustache, he is Elgar all right. If only he had a richer play to be Elgar in.

Benedict Nightingale - The Times.

In showing us Elgar's struggle with depression before and during the First World War, David Pownall plays tricks with time, shuffling syncopated memories...But what might have been an enjoyable tour through the noisy, colourful birth of the modern era is hampered by a figure who is himself something of a stuffed pig. The passions of the rather stodgy Elgar all went into the writing of music...

Rondo tells us too little about Elgar - such biographical scraps as his humble past as the son of a piano tuner are dropped on us with a limp hand and no follow-up...

Rhoda Koenig - The Independent

[Pownall] provides a rich, non-chronological stew, but somehow fails to articulate the heart of his own thesis [that Elgar suffered a mental breakdown and a loss of faith]. The dark centre of the play is more stated than felt, and we could have tolerated a lot more of the music...Elgar's private life is a mystery, and it remains so here. Some irreverent speculation might not have gone amiss. Di Trevis's production...is not tough enough on the text, especially in the meandering second act.

Michael Coveney - The Observer

...a slight, light, over-written and under-thought piece...

It takes Pownall about thirty minutes to reveal that...Elgar feels he is finished as a composer, after which the writing simply ambles round in ever diminishing circles. Did Elgar squander his genius on occasional pieces and patriotic marches? Did the Great War extinguish his inspiration? Did his creativity spring from his depressions? None of these questions is properly asked, let alone answered...

...This is a Portrait of the Artist as an Irascible Old Miserybags, a trot around a peeling national monument, as flaccidly inoffensive as a charade, and tedious without being brief.

The Sunday Times



Sheila Ballantine as Alice Elgar, with Alec McCowen as the composer, in David Pownall's "Elgar's Rondo" (photo © Royal Shakespeare Company)

...A serious and intelligent play...As a portrait of Elgar's creative agony, the play is highly persuasive. This is no imperial jingoist but a man cruelly aware of his own sense of artistic failure...But Pownall never fully solves how to dramatise what is going on inside a composer's head. The device of Jaeger as a ghostly artistic conscience is rather heavy-handed...Elgar's conflict is almost entirely internal : which, however temperamentally accurate, is theatrically limiting...while capturing Elgar's tortured emotional complexity the play leaves unresolved the question of how you dramatise the creative process.

Michael Billington - The Guardian

It was I fear a mistake spending the journey to Stratford-upon-Avon listening to some of Edward Elgar's finest orchestral works. Compared with these great English outpourings of the sublime and the melancholy, *Elgar's Rondo* seems thin and inconsequential stuff. Pownall faces an intractable position : how do you dramatise the life of a genius? Almost everything that was interesting about Elgar went into the work. His life, or at least what we see of it here, appears to have been dull when it wasn't sad. The only occasions when the evening really takes off are when we are granted snippets of the music itself...

Most of the play consists of Elgar being either miserable or apologetic about his outbursts of bad temper, while family, friends and associates desperately attempt to buck him up...

The writing is scrappy and scenes keep grinding to a halt just as they are beginning to get interesting...

The play's final moments show Elgar working on his magnificent cello concerto at the end of the Great War. In those aching, fractured opening chords, we seem to learn more about the composer than anything Pownall has offered in the listless two-and-a-half hours that have gone before.

Charles Spencer - The Daily Telegraph

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Treasurer wishes to remind all members that subscriptions become due on 1 January 1994 in the sum of £10.00 for ordinary and family members which includes branch membership. The subscription for student members is £5.00. Cheques should be sent to the Treasurer (address on the back cover) who will be pleased to supply standing order forms and/or forms for covenanting subscriptions.

Regrettably, it is not possible to send individual letters requesting subscription payments and members are accordingly asked to take action on the basis of this notice.

Does any member possess a copy of Percy M Young's book *Elgar O M* that they would be willing to sell?

Please contact Barry Chapman, 78 Windmill Road, Headington, OXFORD OX3 7BZ
Tel : 0865 62259

BIRTHPLACE NEWS

Attendances picked up sharply in the summer, and during the Three Choirs' Festival, held this year in Worcester, we averaged well over one hundred visitors a day. We were delighted to welcome Jerzy Maksymiuk after his performance of the *Violin Concerto* with Tasmin Little; as those who attended the performance would have expected, he was full of exuberant interest and enthusiasm, and incidentally showed a taste in headgear that closely resembled that of your curator. Readers may also be interested to know that Mr K H Leach from Chippenham came in July. Well into his one hundred and first year, he came with his score of the *Second Symphony* with which he was as familiar as if he had just conducted a performance. "Overwhelming and wonderful" was the comment he entered in our visitors' book. I understand that he celebrated his century on the footplate of a "Castle" class steam locomotive assisting with the firing of the boiler.

We had a slot in the BBC 1 television programme "Travel Show", which featured the Three Choirs' Festival, and early morning viewers of a programme on the same channel called "King of the Road" may have noticed your curator being interviewed among the roses by a fair presenter. The whole cast of the RSC play *Elgar's Rondo*, and also the playwright David Pownall, visited us during the week before the production was previewed. We were very pleased to welcome Jerrold Northrop Moore with a team from BBC Radio 3 who chose to make part of a programme in the "Composer of the Week" series at the Birthplace. The programme on Elgar is due for transmission early in the New Year and may well have taken place by the time you read these notes.

At the time of writing we have had a good response following the circulation of the new Mail Order Catalogue. The list of available recordings is certainly impressive now. There has been a good level of ordering of the new CD transfer of the *Quartet* and *Quintet* by the Stratton Quartet with Harriet Cohen. We can also announce the release of another collectors' item - the recording, again on CD transfer, made of *The Dream of Gerontius* in 1945 by Malcolm Sargent, this time coupled with his 1955 recording of the *Cello Concerto* with Tortelier. Eagerly awaited by many, it is hoped that members will order from the Birthplace, thus making this Society initiative another successful venture. Order under reference Testament SBT 2025 at the concession price of £24.00 less 10% for the two-disc set, adding 50p for postage and packing.

A delightful episode took place in the garden one warm summer afternoon when a young Japanese cellist asked whether he could play. We seated him in the summer-house, and visitors were treated to *Salut d'Amour*, some lines from the *Cello Concerto*, and two movements from one of Bach's suites for solo cello. And in October we received a Japanese film crew engaged in updating a fifteen-year-old film on Elgar, underlining I think the sustained interest in Elgar's music in Japan. The archive has recently been augmented by Kevin Allen who is researching the Norbury archive at Sherridge, and has kindly provided us with copies of correspondence and diary entries which concern the activities the family shared with Elgar. These are available to interested visitors.

A J Bennett

DEVELOPMENTS AT BROADHEATH

At their meeting on 5 October the Trustees of the Birthplace reached a unanimous decision regarding the development of the new Elgar Centre at Broadheath. This largely answers most of the recent criticisms which have been levelled at the proposed development, and in particular takes into account most of the concerns of the Elgar family.

It was agreed to pull down "The Elms" bungalow as soon as is practical, and to erect a more modest development on the site of the bungalow as near to Rose Cottage as possible. It will obviously be necessary to seek new planning permission and a redesign of the building, so there is unlikely to be any immediate development on the site. In due course appropriate landscaping will be undertaken which will sustain the simplicity and rural atmosphere of the site, an important issue for many people.

The Trustees were aware of their responsibility to those who have already donated sums for the project. Andrew Neill, Chairman of the Elgar Society, and himself a Trustee said : "To delay further the decision on the development would add to the poor publicity for the Birthplace and do nothing for the reputation of Elgar". The question of a second centre to complement Broadheath had been raised by some, but there is no prospect of local authority involvement at present; and the need to raise the heavy financial cost of establishing and managing such a scheme from other sources seems to make it an unrealistic proposition. Nevertheless, the Trustees are keeping an open mind about the issue whilst, of course, respecting their own obligations and responsibilities to past and future donors.

The decision of the meeting of 5 October has been warmly welcomed by the vast majority of the Committee of the Elgar Society; and in communicating this to Laurie Watt, Vice-Chairman of the Elgar Foundation, Mr Neill said : "We are as anxious as anyone that the acrimony of the past be put behind us and that our two bodies, together with the Elgar family, work together in the future to ensure that the name of a great composer is enhanced rather than be the continued subject of discord and public dispute".

ATLANTIC BOOKS (BRUCE BURLEY)

8 Baytree Cottages, Hospital Road, Stratton, Bude, North Cornwall
Telephone : 0288 354011

I offer a book search service for out of print books of every variety.
Of special interest Sir Edward Elgar and all musical books.
Enquiries welcomed from all members.

HOLIDAY IN ELGAR COUNTRY. Sunny comfortable well-equipped house on the Malvern Hills with glorious views. Sleeps 5. Colour TV. Gas CH.
Details : 071 289 3082

DISCOVERING ELGAR COUNTRY

When I first became seriously interested in Elgar, I spent a number of holidays exploring the Worcester-Malvern-Hereford area, armed with an Ordnance Survey map, and staying at the Malvern Youth Hostel in Peachfield Road, just a couple of minutes' walk from Craig Lea. They were exciting voyages of discovery - to see with my own eyes places and things I had previously only read about.

Nowadays, with the growth of the tourist industry, it is possible to see this region and all its Elgar treasures without having to do the spade work oneself beforehand. Several companies have set up itineraries, and I thought it might be useful to give members brief descriptions of what is presently available.

ACORN ACTIVITIES, based in Hereford, provide a wide range of holidays in the Welsh Borders and South Wales area (see advertisement for details). This year there are two Elgar weekends; 4 & 5 June, and 1 & 2 October. The itinerary begins on Saturday morning with an introductory talk (by an Elgar "expert" who will lead the whole weekend), followed by a visit to Hereford (Cathedral and Plas Gwyn), Mordiford Bridge, Malvern, and Birchwood (for afternoon tea). On the June weekend, after an early supper, there is a concert in the Malvern Festival; and the October weekend is also scheduled to include an Elgar concert in the area (no details yet). Sunday is given over to the various Elgarian locations in Worcester itself; plus Sherridge, Napleton Grange, Powick, and the Birthplace at Broadheath. The cost of the weekend is £120 per person, to include travel, the concert, lunch on both days, and supper on Saturday. Accommodation is **not** included, but can be booked through Acorn (who offer a wide range, including self-catering) or arranged independently. Acorn have generously agreed to donate 10% of the value of the weekend to the Elgar Birthplace Appeal. I have received an account of last year's weekend from a Somerset couple who attended it. They write: "Our 'Elgar Birthday' weekend break...was one of the most enjoyable holidays we have ever had...The organisation was brilliant...A minibus collected us...and from the beginning to the end of each day we had nothing to think about except the fascination of all we saw and heard...Cora Weaver gave us a delightfully human and personal insight into Elgar's life and guided us from place to place with such humour and knowledge...Visits were made to several of the houses in which Elgar lived and at each one we listened to music he composed. We found it hard to pick out highlights because it was all so enjoyable."

"SPIRIT OF ELGAR" is a three-day cultural tour (advertised in the previous JOURNAL), and is based on Wyche Keep, an Arts & Crafts style house dating from the turn of the century, and high on the Malvern Hills. It is the home of Jon Williams, a chartered designer and an expert on architecture. He organises cultural and heritage holidays, and finds increasingly that many people are now being drawn to this region. In particular, Americans are turning to it, disillusioned by the commercialism and overcrowding of London, Stratford, the Cotswolds, etc. A recent party from the USA described the Welsh Borderland tour as "as memorable as Kenneth Clark's 'Civilisation'". The aim of the Elgar tour is "to provide a backdrop of place and era, scenically and architecturally, to Elgar's inspiration and creativity. The tour is one of discovery and research rather than sight-seeing a tourist route".

There will be "continued discussion over candlelit dinner" each evening to encourage "a more personalised and memorable experience" (each tour is open to between two and six people). Mr Williams has researched thoroughly the subject of Elgar's creative sources, and Carol Holt and Jim Bennett are among those who have helped him.

The first day features Worcester, including the Birthplace and Claines churchyard, and ends with an evening walk on the Malvern Hills. Day 2 deals with Malvern, and also covers Longdon Marsh, Birchwood, and the River Terme at Knightwick. The final day moves to Hereford, and takes in Mordiford Bridge also. The cost for the three day tour, to include dinner, bed and breakfast at Wyche Keep, is £240 per person. It may be possible by arrangement to organise a weekend (two nights) for £130. The number for Wyche Keep is 0684 567018. North American members may obtain details of the three-day tour from the agent, British Associates on Freephone 1-800-227-550.

Much less ambitious than either of the above, but possibly attractive to some members are the Wyvern Guides, who offer a variety of Elgarian fare based on Worcester. The simplest is an "Elgar in Worcester" walk, costing £2. They also organise a coach tour of places relating to Elgar in Hereford & Worcester. Further details can be obtained from Gay Alderton (0905 422126). Wyvern Guides are registered with the Heart of England Tourist Board.



Craeg Lea, Wells Road, Malvern (photo : J Cartwright)

ACORN ACTIVITIES

FOR THE BEST BRITISH HOLIDAY EVER

All-year Activity
Holidays and Breaks

Professionally
Accredited
Instructors

For Young and Old,
Singles and Families,
and Groups

All Equipment Provided



Beautiful Herefordshire,
Shropshire and Wales

Tailor Made to suit
your Interests and
Budget

Safety First

Self-Catering, Hotel
Guest House, Farmhouse
and Group Accommodation

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN OR IMPROVE YOUR SKILL

AIR SPORTS

Ballooning
Flying
Gliding
Hang Gliding
Helicopter Flights
Microlighting
Parachuting
Paragliding
Kite Stunt Flying

WATER SPORTS

Canoeing
Narrowboats
Rafting
Power Boats
Sailing
Windsurfing
Surfing
Water Skiing
Jet Skis
Scuba Diving
Learn to Swim
White Water
Rafting

COUNTRY SPORTS

Clay Pigeon
Shooting
Falconry
Riding
Pony
Trekking
Trail Riding
Salmon & Trout
Fishing
Gun Dog
Training

MOTOR SPORTS

Car Rallying
Four-Wheel
Off Road
Go-Karting
Quad Biking
Motocross
Motoracing
Learn
to Drive
Motor Cycle
Training

SPECIALIST PURSUITS

Bungee Jumping
Walking
Climbing
Abseiling
Caving
Paintball
Laser Games
Cycling
Mountain
Bikes
Survival
Archery
Bird Watching

BALL SPORTS

Golf
Tennis
Squash
Bowls
Badminton
Snooker
Cricket

ARTS & CRAFTS

Tapestry
Crochet
Tatting
Rag Rugs
Embroidery
Decoupage
Machine Knitting
Spinning
Weaving
Lace Making
Fabric Sculpture
Photography
Pottery
Gardening
Wood Turning
Basket Making
Painting and
Drawing
Book Binding
Calligraphy
Flower Arranging
Gourmet Cooking
Sugarcraft
Video Skills

Silversmithing

Etching
Glassmaking
Bridge
Papermaking
Strawcraft
Beauty Care

TOURS & STUDIES

Houses & Gardens
Antiques
Countryside
Music
Languages

SPECIAL WEEKENDS

Cider & Wine
Murder Mystery
Elgar
Dancing
Wildlife
Gardening
Train Trips

FOR YOUR FREE BROCHURE WITH OVER 100 ACTIVITIES

ACORN ACTIVITIES, 7 EAST STREET, HEREFORD HR1 4RY

TEL: 0432-357335 FAX: 0432-341871

RANDOM RAMBLINGS...

To mark the collaboration of the Society and the Testament record company in the project to re-issue on CD the first complete recording of *The Dream of Gerontius*, London Branch has organised (with the co-operation of Testament) a special Society meeting. This will take place at Imperial College (Sherfield Building - Read Theatre) on Monday 31 January at 7.30 pm. The Society's Chairman, Andrew Neill, will be in conversation with John Heddle Nash (son of the Gerontius), Malcolm Walker (son of the Angel of the Agony), and Andrew Walter (recording engineer on the transfers). Excerpts from the recording will be heard and sets available for purchase. Admission to the meeting will be at no charge, but by ticket. Application should be made to the Secretary of London Branch, David Bury (address on back cover). Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

* * * * *

The last issue carried a report of the unveiling of the plaque commemorating Elgar's opening of the Abbey Road studios on 12 November 1931. I recently came across some information which suggests that he had been preceded in the No 1 Studio by Eric Coates and the London Symphony Orchestra. On 3 November they had recorded "In the Country" from *From Meadow to Mayfair*, and the miniature overture *The Merrymakers*. The matrix numbers (2B2007 to 2B2010 inclusive) immediately precede those of *Falstaff*.

* * * * *

A very interesting talk was broadcast during the interval of the Promenade concert which included *The Music Makers* on 22 August, when Kenneth Shenton spoke on the friendship between Elgar and William Wolstenholme, the blind organist for whom Elgar acted as amanuensis when he took his music degree at Oxford. Elgar initially taught Wolstenholme the violin, but when Wolstenholme later gave up the violin these lessons developed into a general musical education. Several of Elgar's letters, recently discovered, were read out. In one written in September 1888, Elgar thanks Wolstenholme for sending a key to the braille alphabet, without which he found difficulty with the previous letter. "I could not get on very well at first, but by the time I had worried the meaning out of the first page, I had almost learned your extraordinary alphabet". One can imagine the puzzle-loving Elgar responding to the challenge. In the same letter he apologises for not completing some work he had promised to do for Wolstenholme. "So much writing to do during the holidays. Have finished that unaccompanied Mass - distinctly barn-door - but easy". This is an intriguing comment, and I suppose must raise the possibility of a lost Elgar work. He was certainly writing church music about that time; the anthem *Ecce Sacerdos Magnus* was first performed on 9 October that year, but of course it is neither unaccompanied, nor part of the liturgy of the mass. We hope to include an article by Mr Shenton on the Elgar-Wolstenholme friendship in a future issue.

* * * * *

In March 1898 Elgar rented Birchwood Lodge as a country retreat. His piano there was a 1844 Broadwood square piano which he had acquired from his father's business. This instrument will be exhibited, freshly restored, in the King's Library at the British Library at Great Russell Street, London, together with autograph sketches and scores of works which are known to have been composed at Birchwood between 1898 and 1903 when the lease came to an end. This instrument has recently been passed by the Broadwood Trust to the Cobbe Collection of Historical Keyboard Instruments at Hatchlands Park in Surrey for restoration purposes; and the exhibition, which will open in late January for two months, is sponsored by Booz Allen & Hamilton and mounted in co-operation with the Cobbe Foundation.

In the 1994 Stefan Zweig Series there are two events which will be of interest to Elgarians. On Tuesday 10 May in the lecture theatre of the British Museum Dr Brian Trowell, Heather Professor of Music at Oxford University, will give a talk on the *Piano Quintet in A minor*, Op.84, of which the manuscript is in the Library's collections. The work will be performed by the Nash Ensemble in the Wigmore Hall on 12 May, and this concert will also include Bliss's *Conversations*, and Warlock's *The Curlew*, in which the tenor soloist will be Ian Partridge.

For full details of these and of the other events in the series, please send a stamped addressed envelope to The Secretary, Music Library, The British Library, Great Russell Street, London WC1 3DG.

* * * * *

Schumann and Robin Holloway are the featured composers at this year's Malvern Festival which runs from 22 May to 4 June. There seems to be less Elgar than normal; *The Dream of Gerontius* on 26 May, the *Serenade for Strings* on 29th, some unspecified choral music on 30th; and at the final concert on 4 June, given by the National Orchestra of Wales under Grant Llewellyn, the *Introduction & Allegro* for Strings. Details and booking forms can be obtained from The Box Office, Malvern Festival Theatre, Grange Road, Malvern WR14 3HB (tel: 0684 892277).

* * * * *

The concert on 5 April at the Festival Hall (see Dates for your Diary) promises to be a special affair. It celebrates the 70th birthday of Sir Neville Marriner, and as well as the *Enigma Variations*, includes Haydn's *Piano Concerto in D* and Schubert's *Shepherd on the Rock*. The soloists are Alfred Brendel, Sylvia McNair and Andrew Marriner. Sir Neville has a considerable Elgarian pedigree, not least on record, where his recent recording of the *First Symphony* was well received (see review January 1992). But he is perhaps best remembered for two recordings from the late '60s made at a time when Elgar's reputation was being re-established: first, an Argo disc of music for strings, including the first recording of Percy Young's Suite from *The Spanish Lady*; and a recording for EMI of some of the "lighter" Elgar pieces, many of which had only previously been recorded by Elgar himself (and were then unavailable). The disc also included the first recordings of the *Bassoon Romance* and *Sevillana*. We wish Sir Neville a happy birthday and many more years of music-

making.

* * * * *

Older members of the London Branch will be sad to hear of the death of Brian Gould. Brian was a branch member from the beginning and a regular attender at meetings. For a number of years he worked in the "Gramophone Exchange" under the legendary 'Pop' Russell, first in Shaftesbury Avenue, and later in Wardour Street. More recently he had worked for "The Gramophone" in the preparation of their Classical Catalogue, where his encyclopedic knowledge of records and his dedication to accuracy were invaluable. He was a considerable help to John Knowles in the compilation of the Elgar Discography.

* * * * *

I had often pondered upon the line from Mrs Browning's "Sabbath Morning at Sea" in *Sea Pictures* which runs : "And on that sea commixed with fire" (a line Elgar repeats). I now realise that the imagery is biblical : "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire" (Revelation 15 : 2). So now you know - if you didn't already! Another in our occasional questions : Which of Elgar's works was also known for a time as a Dirge? And when and where was its first public (as opposed to private) performance? No prizes (as usual), but the answer will appear in the next issue.

* * * * *

Members may well recall that on 1 January 1992 the Elgar Society merged with the Friends of the Birthplace. The Friends were given two years free membership of the Society and have thus received the JOURNAL during that time. It is encouraging to report that a good number of Friends have now become full members of the Society and we give them a warm welcome to our ranks. The JOURNAL will of course continue to bring news of the Birthplace and the developments there.

* * * * *

The following items are on sale and available from the Secretary:

Society ties (maroon) £5.00

Society badges £3.00

Ladies' headsquares £8.50

LP 'Elgar's Choral Songs' (ELGS 002) BBC Singers/Boult £3.50

Cassette Violin & Piano music. Flory/Nicholls/Collett £5.75

The Secretary's address is on the back cover.

Most back issues of the JOURNAL are still available. Please send a s.a.e. to the Editor for a list.

* * * * *

More details of the "Elgar plus" weekend at Warwick, mentioned in our last issue. The revised title is "The Warwick Weekend of British Music" and it is a long weekend from Friday 29 April to Tuesday 3 May. It features not only Elgar but more than twenty composers from this century. The Elgar works include the *Organ Sonata* and the three chamber works, piano pieces and salon music (but not *The Dream of Gerontius* as originally announced). The weekend is organised by the Warwick Arts Society and a leaflet will be published in February when the booking opens. Interested members should ring 0926 410747 to be put on the mailing list. There will be special ticket offers for those attending the whole weekend, and details of special rates for local accommodation.

* * * * *

A recent performance of the *Enigma Variations* in the USA is worthy of note. The Ventura County Symphony have as their conductor Boris Brodt, who "attends to his duties with focus and flourish", according to the *Los Angeles Times*. "He has a crisp charisma. He trades a baton for a microphone to exchange a few pleasantries, verbal program notes, and promotional entreaties before - and sometimes between - the music-making business at hand". The VCS have begun to employ visual elements in their concerts where appropriate, and during the Elgar piece a picture of each variant was shown on the backdrop behind the orchestra. The concerts are proving popular, and, concluded the *Times*, "whatever you think of the non-musical trappings, the aural results were impressive".

* * * * *

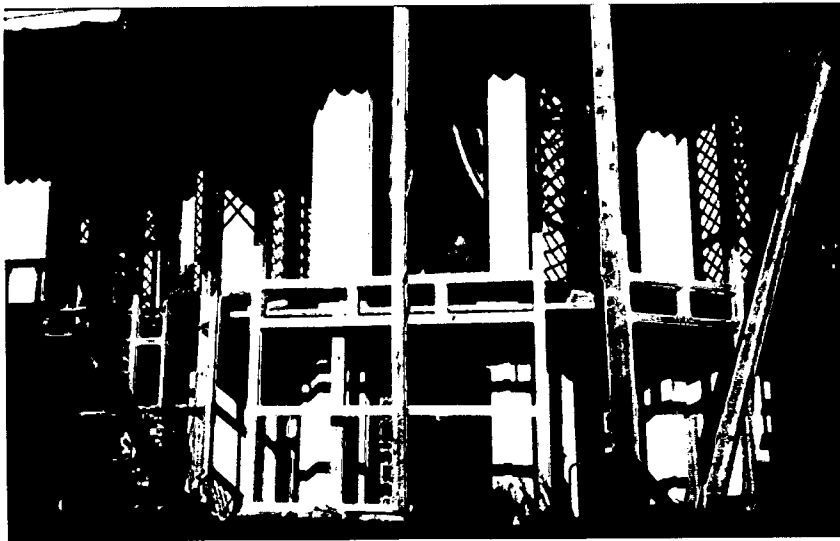
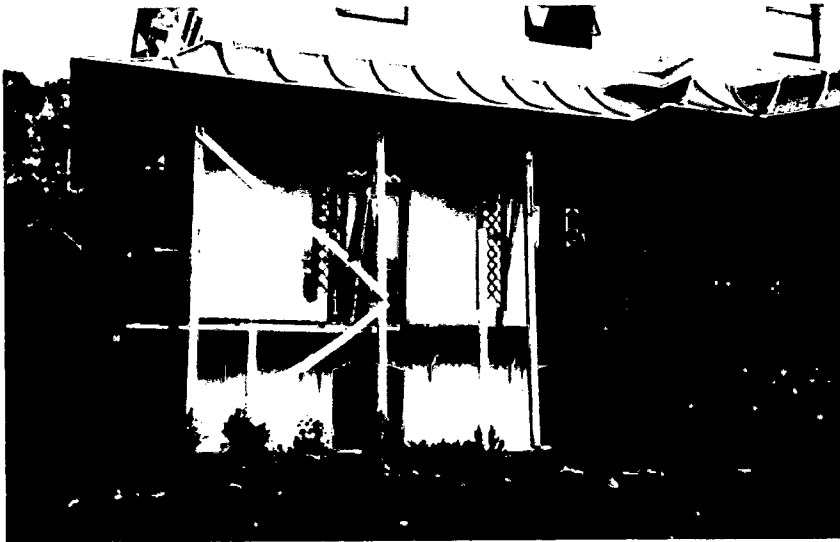
Members may recall a performance of the *Coronation Ode* in Leicester in May during a "Singing Day" organised by the British Federation of Young Choirs. They have a number of copies available of a special reprint edition of the *Ode*, and these can be obtained from BFYC, 37 Frederick Street, Loughborough, Leics LE11 3BH. The price, which includes postage and packing, is £2.00 to members of BFYC, or £4.50 to non-members. This is a marvellous opportunity, as the *Coronation Ode* has been out of print for years.

* * * * *

Confession being good for the soul, I own up to two errors - one of omission, one of commission - in the last JOURNAL. First, the photos of the unveiling of the plaque at Abbey Road were taken by Steve Hickey, and are copyright EMI. Then, we apologise sincerely to Dr Donald Hunt whose Birthday Honour was an OBE, not an MBE.

* * * * *

As can be seen from the photographs overleaf, structural repairs of a substantial nature have been taking place at Plas Gwyn, and more are required in the immediate future. A considerable sum of money is needed urgently. We hope to bring fuller details of the situation in our next issue.



Photographs showing the repairs taking place to the veranda at Plas Gwyn, last October. Dry rot was found when the exterior of the house came to be repainted, and the window of what was Elgar's study has had to be replaced, together with the surrounding plaster and brickwork. (Photos : Dr D J Marsden)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

6 January	Fantasia & Fugue, Enigma Variations <i>RSNO/Lazarev</i>	Royal Concert Hall Glasgow
18 January	Cockaigne <i>BBC Concert O/Wordsworth</i>	Queen Elizabeth Hall South Bank 1.05 pm
21 January	Symphony no 2 <i>BBC Nat Orch Wales/Handley</i>	St David's Hall Cardiff 7.30 pm
26 January	Introduction & Allegro <i>CBSO/ Elder</i>	Symphony Hall Birmingham
28 January	as above	Barbican Hall London
28 January	Symphony no 1 <i>BBC Nat Orch Wales/Otaka</i>	St David's Hall Cardiff 7.30 pm
29 January	Enigma Variations <i>RLPO/Pesek</i>	Colston Hall Bristol 7.30 pm
1 February	Wand of Youth Suite no 2 <i>BBC Concert O/Wordsworth</i>	Queen Elizabeth Hall South Bank 1.05 pm
11 February	Symphony no 1 <i>LPO/Hickox</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
12 February	Introduction & Allegro <i>RPO/Handley</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
16 February	Symphony no 1 <i>New Queens Hall O/Judd</i>	Fairfield Hall Croydon 8.00 pm
18 February	repeat of 11 February	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
24 February	Cello Concerto <i>Isserlis/Philh/Gardiner</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
26 February	The Spirit of England <i>Edinburgh Bach Choir/ Scottish Sinf/Mantle</i>	Greyfriars Church Edinburgh
26 February	Cello Concerto <i>Schiff/Philh/Gardiner</i>	St David's Hall Cardiff 7.30 pm

27. February	repeat of above concert	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
5 March	Nursery Suite <i>Rutland Sinf/Collett</i>	Festival Hall Corby 7.30 pm
5 March	"Elgar and Opera" <i>Day School with Dr Percy Young</i>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Bristol
6 March	Enigma Variations <i>LPO/Welser-Möst</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
8 March	The Dream of Gerontius <i>J.Rigby, M.Hill, J.Koc/Goldsmiths Ch U/ RPO/Wright</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
12 March	Wind Quintets <i>South Downs College ensemble</i>	Havant Arts Centre (ring 0705 696286)
26 March	The Dream of Gerontius <i>Burgess, Hayward/BBC PO/Hunt</i>	Worcester Cathedral 7.00 pm
26 March	The Light of Life <i>Soloists/Otley Chor Soc/Lindley</i>	Parish Church Otley 7.30 pm
26 March	Bassoon Romance <i>Moore/St Edmundsbury Bach O/ Oxley</i>	St Mary's Church Bury St Edmunds
28 March	Violin Concerto <i>Cho-Liang Lin/RPO/Handley</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
28 March	Serenade for Strings <i>London Festival O/Pople</i>	Queen Elizabeth Hall South Bank
30 March	Enigma Variations <i>Nat Youth O/C Davis</i>	Barbican Hall London
5 April	Enigma Variations <i>Academy St Martin/Marriner (see Random Ramblings)</i>	Royal Festival Hall London
23 April	Cello Concerto, Enigma Variations <i>R.Cohen/BBC SO/Lazarev</i>	Town Hall Leeds 7.30 pm
29 April - 3 May	"Weekend of British Music" (see Random Ramblings)	Warwick (tel : 0926 410747)
6 May	Introduction & Allegro <i>LPO/Simon</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank

7 May	Falstaff, Pomp & Circumstance 3 <i>Rutland Sinf/Collett</i>	Festival Hall Corby 7.30 pm
7 May	Enigma Variations <i>Guildford PO/Willcocks</i>	Guildford Civic Hall (ring 0483 444666)
12 May	Piano Quintet <i>Nash Ensemble</i>	Wigmore Hall London
13 May	Introduction & Allegro <i>LPO/Simon</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
14 May	Sea Pictures <i>Della Jones/BBC Nat O Wales/Atherton</i>	St David's Hall Cardiff 7.30 pm
14 May	Music Makers, Sea Pictures, Bavarian Dances, Pomp & Circumstance 1 <i>Fiona Kimm/Fareham Phil/Hall</i>	Ferneham Hall Fareham (enquiries : 0329 232576)
21 May	Cello Concerto <i>L Gorokhov/RPO/Menuhin</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank
23 May	repeat of above concert	Fairfield Hall Croydon

**The ELGAR Society
North West Branch Manchester**

**10th
ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON**

to be held at
**The Portland Thistle Hotel
Piccadilly Gardens Manchester**

on
Sunday 6 March 1994 at 1.00 pm

There will be a Guest Speaker

Price £10.00 per person

**Members from other branches are most welcome to join us
For further details please telephone 061 485 6356**

BOOK REVIEW

Elgar by Robert Anderson

The Dent Master Musicians. 493 pp. £30

As members will know from the Editor's brief initial welcome on p. 133 of the September 1993 issue, this is a very fine addition to the Elgar bibliography. It can be unhesitatingly recommended.

Since 1899 the Master Musicians series has provided a prime and reliable source of reference for students and music lovers in respect of major composers. The original aim was to provide "introductory" studies, but over time the trend has been towards more comprehensive books with more musical analysis. Elgar was the first modern British composer to be included with the appearance in 1939 of the volume by W H Reed, who had been directly involved in music making with Elgar for almost a quarter of a century and had enjoyed the composer's close friendship. In 1971 this was replaced by Professor Ian Parrott's book, more objective in its view of its subject at a time when Elgar's music was only just beginning to return to public favour. While this slim volume was notable for many insights, with such a series it is inevitable that as time passes the need arises for serious updating. The amount of biographical and editorial work since 1971 by Dr Jerrold Northrop Moore and many others, including Dr Anderson himself, coupled with the deeper interest in a wider range of Elgar's music now shown by the music loving public makes the appearance of this substantial new book doubly welcome. With 175 of its 493 pages devoted to the composer's life, space is left for much valuable information about the music, a very detailed calendar of events, bibliographies, and comprehensive lists of works including projected items.

We learn at once from the Preface how the author ranks Elgar as a composer - with the last great Romantics, Mahler and Strauss. His view of Elgar originated in his teens when he judged the *Enigma Variations* as being superior to the Brahms *Haydn*. He lists the core of Elgar's achievement as the *Variations*, *Introduction & Allegro*, *Falstaff*, the *Cello Concerto*, the *String Quartet*, *Gerontius*, and *The Kingdom*, with the *Violin Concerto* and the *Second Symphony* closely following. The lack of much admiration for *The Apostles* explains its absence from these lists but, oddly, no reason is given for the omission of the *First Symphony*. The author goes on to record his admiration for the genius that "cries aloud from the pages of his full scores", the unerring skill, the sheer professionalism, the orchestration in Tovey's words, 'astoundingly subtle, uncannily efficient, and utterly original', and the abundant evidence of "a quicksilver creative mind".

Thanks to the work of his devoted biographers over the years the volume of information now available about Elgar's day-to-day life is truly amazing and this presents the author of a book of this type with problems. Clearly there must be some sifting and condensing of material; decisions have to be made about the extent facts are to be commented upon, the extent to which the author puts himself into the shoes of the composer. Never one to waste words, as we know from his *Elgar in Manuscript*, Dr Anderson has opted to let the facts speak for themselves, skilfully weaving, in a neat and most readable style, a vast amount of information about the

NEW IN THE DENT MASTER MUSICIANS SERIES

ELGAR Robert Anderson 508pp. £30.00 hardback

"a pleasure to read...worth every pound" Wilfrid Mellers, *The Musical Times*

NEW PAPERBACK EDITIONS INCLUDE

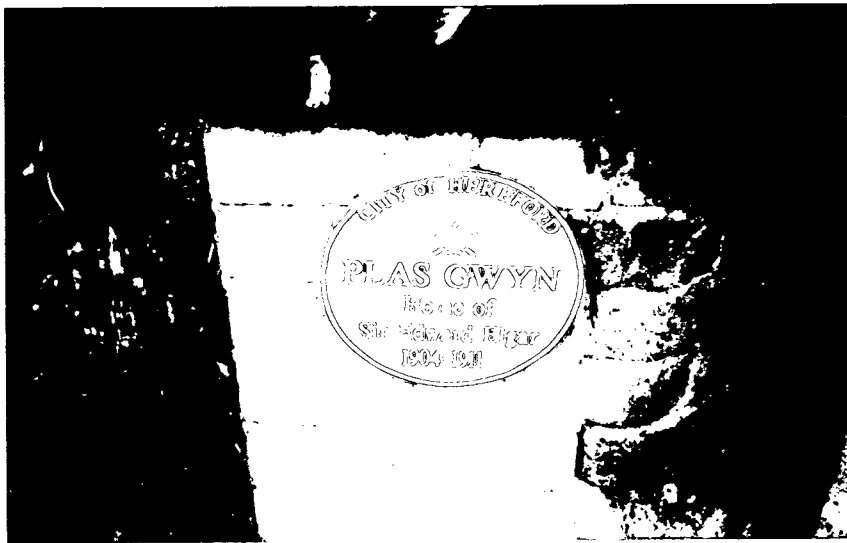
BRAHMS Malcolm MacDonald **BRITTEN Michael Kennedy**
RACHMANINOFF Geoffrey Norris **VIVALDI Michael Talbot**

ALSO NEW FROM DENT

MOZART AND HIS CIRCLE : A Biographical Dictionary
Peter Clive 242pp. £20.00 hardback

"little masterpieces of biography" Richard Law, *Opera*

A list of Dent music books is available from
The Orion Publishing Group
Orion House
5 Upper St Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA



The new plaque by the gate at Plas Gwyn, Hereford, which was erected last summer. There has been a plaque on the house itself for a number of years.

events of a lifetime into the allotted pages to form a chronological narrative which starts with the Kent ancestral connection and finishes with the composer's death on 23 February 1934. Footnotes are avoided as much as possible. There is no sensationalism here and this is to be applauded. Very occasionally one might wish for more comment. There is no separate summing-up as such of Elgar the man, which some readers will miss, though the picture which emerges from the narrative is one of a busy, many-sided personality, living through and generally coping in his own way with the cares that any sensitive artist is bound to face in a world changing as his world changed. Some idea of the author's assessment of Elgar's stature and importance in cultural terms can perhaps be guessed by the reader from the concluding phrase of this part of the book "...and the Windflower said what needed to be said : 'He is our Shakespeare of music'".

When we come to the descriptive analyses of the music we find that these take up 226 pages and are most comprehensive. Based on Dr Anderson's thorough and detailed research amongst the manuscripts and his practical experience as a conductor they should become compulsory reading for programme-note writers for the foreseeable future. As an indication of the space devoted to the major works, *Gerontius* has nineteen pages, *The Kingdom* sixteen, and the *First Symphony* eleven. The part-songs, which the author notes as proof that Elgar was not insensitive to words and that his strength was not solely in the grand gesture, are allocated eleven pages and there is extensive coverage of other smaller and less well-known works. The analyses are followed by a summary chapter entitled "Musical Characteristics" which begins by detailing the composer's working methods, pinpointing afresh the place of the keyboard in the process of composition. A warning to performers not to allow the sheer splendour of his sonorities to seduce them away from the lithe tautness of interpretation exemplified by Elgar's own performances is followed by a full survey of the general nature of the composer's output and style, effectively identifying and evaluating his major strengths. His outstanding gift of being able to write music as "normal" as Brahms - rare among late Romantic composers - and also the fact that he never attempted the harmonic audacities of Richard Strauss or the ironic asperities of Mahler is explained in terms of his lifelong pleasure in the expert creation of lighter music and England's happy insularity. In this part of the book Dr Anderson picks out some works where in his view the quality slips a little, mentioning for example some weaknesses in *The Apostles*, *The Music Makers*, and the *Piano Quintet*; in general, however, his constant admiration for Elgar's thematic and harmonic invention, for the sure touch in the manipulation of the musical material and for the seemingly effortless instinct in orchestration shines through these cogent and penetrating pages, making the reader wish to turn at once to scores and recordings to listen again with freshly opened ears.

Although the illustrations in this book are well-selected, thirteen is not a generous number : in 1980 Michael Kennedy's 356-page book on Britten included twenty-three. The dust jacket picture of Elgar, eyes and head downcast, a detail taken from the Talbot Hughes portrait painted while he was working on the *Introduction & Allegro* in 1905, puts emphasis on the reflective and even withdrawn aspects of the composer's personality rather than on those active and energetic qualities which enabled him to forge a successful career from somewhat unpromising circumstances. One or two small slips have escaped the editorial net. These points,

however, are of no consequence at all in the context of the mass of relevant information provided in this well-presented book and the strength of its positive message.

Trevor Fenemore-Jones

Julius Harrison and the Importunate Muse by Geoffrey Self.

Scolar Press, 1993

How many music-lovers nowadays know the name, much less the achievement, of Julius Harrison? Elgarians, of course, and people of my generation. Geoffrey Self traces his life and career succinctly ; "an English musician as a father, a German musician as a mother, and a home set in "The Red Earth of Worcestershire" (title of Harrison's unpublished, unfinished autobiography). The first chapter heading, The Severn and the Nile, suggests a slightly more exotic journey than that from Stourport to Birmingham's Midland Institute, and refers to Harrison's *Cleopatra*, to a text by Gerald Cumberland, which won the Norwich Music Festival competition in 1908, and brought him £50, publication, and performance under Henry Wood.

He moved to London, beginning the round of free-lance jobs that led in 1913 to work at Covent Garden. At close hand he observed Nikisch, Richter, and Weingartner in Wagner; between 1915 and 1919 he conducted twenty-two performances of *Tristan* for Beecham's Opera Company, and after the war consolidated his reputation as an opera conductor with the BNO. He became director of opera at the RAM and then in 1930 took up the conductorship at Hastings, whose orchestra in due course rivalled that of Bournemouth.

Mr Self's writing is athletic and elegant, and he places each move in its wider background. His prime concern, however, is the "tug-of-war between conducting and creative work". Harrison was self-critical to the extent that he destroyed most of his early work : "better had it all been if my friends, instead of heaping praise on such dis-ordered stuff, had handed me the asp of condemnation wherewith to end my hapless *Cleopatra*". Mr Self is equally severe : about the *Worcestershire Suite*, "his style was still over-ornate harmonically and under-composed texturally".

This leads one to want to believe him when he makes high claims for the music composed when domestic tragedy and increasing deafness ended Harrison's public life. "The extent of Harrison's mature evolution, which changed him from being an ordinary composer into the creator of a group of masterpieces, has scarcely any precedent". Mr Self reckons the group to comprise the *Autumn Landscape*, the *Viola and Piano Sonata*, *Bredon Hill*, the *Mass in C* [1948], the *Requiem* [1957], and the *Missa Liturgica*. Even in assessing the *Mass* and the *Requiem*, vast symphonic structures, Mr Self is sober, admitting the *Mass* to be a "flawed masterpiece" and that Harrison does not always stamp his personality on the *Requiem*. Yet he claims there are movements here among the finest in English choral music of this century, speaking of sublimity, grandeur, surging energy, dancing lightness. Hugh Ottaway in *The New Grove* supports him : in the *Mass* and *Requiem* Harrison "composed with a fiery enthusiasm in a conservative style". For

some years the *Mass* was regularly performed, and the composer heard it twenty-eight times. The appendix lists a tape in the National Sound Archive. One result of this modest, well-balanced book should surely be a revival of a Harrison work in Radio 3's 1995 year of British music.

The *Requiem* was a centenary tribute to Elgar. In the book's third paragraph Mr Self traces the crossing paths of Elgar and Harrison, and I wish he had reprinted in full the *Reminiscence of Elgar* broadcast in 1960, as well as the increasingly acerbic correspondence with John Christie from early Glyndebourne days.

Diana McVeagh

RECORD REVIEWS

"The Elgar Edition" Vol.3

Overtures *Froissart*, Op.19. *Cockaigne* (rec.1926), Op.40. *In the South*, Op.50. Interludes from *Falstaff*. Cello Concerto, Op.85 (with Beatrice Harrison). *Beau Brummel Minuet* (1928 & 1929). *Rosemary*. *Salut d'Amour*, Op.12. *Minuet*, Op.21. *Sérénade Lyrique*. *May Song*. *Carissima*. *Land of Hope and Glory*. Five Piano Improvisations. *Pomp & Circumstance Marches 1 - 5*, Op.39 (1926-30). *Prelude, The Kingdom*, Op.51. *Pomp & Circumstance Marches 1, 2 & 4* (1932-33). *Cockaigne* (1933). *Serenade for Strings*, Op.20. *Elegy*, Op.58.

conducted by Sir Edward Elgar

Woodland Interlude and Triumphal March from *Caractacus*, Op.35. (cond. *Collingwood*); *Mina* (cond. *Murray*, previously unpublished : and cond. *Haydn Wood*); *Coronation March*, Op.65 (cond. *Ronald*).

London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra and BBC Symphony Orchestra.

EMI 3 CD set CDS 7 54568 2

This third and final release of Elgar's own recordings is largely a miscellany of minor works left over from the preceding volumes. The principal item is the celebrated Beatrice Harrison performance of the *Cello Concerto* which appears on the first disc of the set together with the three concert overtures and the *Falstaff* Interludes.

Elgar's approach to his early works in old age betrays no lessening of interest in them or confidence in the inspiration of so many years before. His performance on record of *Froissart* over forty years after it was composed seems to rejuvenate him. This is also a late recording, technically superior to some of the other offerings in this issue, and has been well served in the transfer to CD. The recording of *Cockaigne* which follows dates from Elgar's first recording session in the Queen's Hall some seven years before so is understandably somewhat less clear in texture. It is however no less exuberant in style and has the enormous advantage - denied the later version (also in the set) - of inclusion of the organ. The recording of *In the South* which follows is another splendid performance well captured on disc. Here the indexing enables access to be gained to three internal sections of the work (commencing at figs.20, 34 and 40 of the score). It would be interesting to know when the two Interludes from *Falstaff* were last publicly performed on their own. The *Dream Interlude* is virtually the same as in the complete work but the second

Elgar '94

CHORAL FESTIVAL

July 16 - 23, Reigate

Patron: Wulstan Atkins MBE
Artistic Director: Leslie Olive

Special arrangements for members of The Elgar Society

Elgar '94 is a celebration of Elgar being held in the old Surrey market town of Reigate, in July 1994.

Major performances during the week of festivities include:

Monday 18 July
The Dream of Gerontius

Thursday 21 July
The Apostles

Saturday 23 July
The Kingdom

Before the performance of *The Apostles*, *An Elgar Afternoon* is to be held in the luxurious surroundings of Nutfield Priory, with Elgar chamber music, tea, and a lecture by Jerrold Northrop Moore on *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*.

Elgar '94 forms part of a festival called Reigate Summer Music, which has a strong emphasis upon education and training.

The choir for the three choral performances will be formed by the members of

the Reigate Summer Music Summer School for Advanced Choral Singers - which makes this a superb opportunity for Elgar enthusiasts who are also singers to take part.

Residential accommodation is available in Reigate and the surrounding area. For members of the choral summer school, much of the accommodation is very luxurious at much reduced special prices which the summer school organisers have agreed with hoteliers.

These special discount arrangements will also apply for any members of The Elgar Society who wish to attend the week as listeners.

There is a full programme of activity during the week ranging from lunch-time music every day to an organised visit to the country's largest vineyard.

Members of the Elgar Society who would like more information about attending either as singers or listeners should return the enquiry form enclosed with this issue of the Journal.

Interlude (Gloucestershire. Shallow's Orchard) is extended by seventeen bars to provide a repeat not in the original score. The orchestra used is the smaller New Symphony Orchestra which is also utilised for the *Cello Concerto* recording. Patricia Cleveland-Peck in her introduction to Beatrice Harrison's autobiography¹ relates that "Elgar acknowledged that it was thanks to Beatrice's performances that the Concerto grew and grew in popularity. Whenever Elgar himself conducted the Concerto he requested Beatrice as soloist and she played it with him very often". As transferred to CD there are moments of slight roughness in some louder passages and the connection between the first and second movements is momentarily severed, whilst the locating index for the latter (no.10 on the disc) causes the movement to start at the *Allegro molto* two bars in from the beginning. These details however in no way detract from the enjoyment of this performance which was subjected to a large number of re-takes before being passed for first issue. As in some other recordings of the period one suspects one can hear on occasion a discreet reinforcement of the string bass by tuba and/or contrabassoon (as at fig.14 in the first movement).

The most interesting items on the second CD are undoubtedly the five piano improvisations which Elgar referred to as "piano tinklings" in correspondence with Fred Gaisberg. We learn from Dr J N Moore's *Elgar on Record* that publication of this material was in mind but the first improvisation was failed on the "wear test" and the third and fifth were submitted to Sir Landon Ronald (the recording company's music adviser) for consideration but they failed to appear and the circumstances are not known. Dora Powell tells how she had heard a number of good pianists "but I have never heard anything quite like this. He didn't play like a pianist, he almost seemed to play like a whole orchestra. It sounded full without being loud and he contrived to make you hear the instruments joining in"². There is no profound inspiration in them, though one may discern the influence of something or other here and there, but it is fascinating just to eavesdrop on the old man simply left to himself at the piano!

The third CD begins with a performance of the Prelude from *The Kingdom*. Here Elgar uses an arrangement made for a previous concert performance in which the music cuts from four bars after fig.15 in the score to fig.201 in the finale of the oratorio. This avoids what would otherwise be an indeterminate transition (to the section "In the Upper Room") and provides a concert ending for the Prelude to stand on its own. The *Pomp & Circumstance Marches* (1, 2 and 4 only) included on this disc are sonically superior to the earlier versions on the preceding disc although all are abridged in one way or another to enable them to fit on to one side of a 78 rpm record. Together with *The Kingdom* Prelude and the second version of *Cockaigne* these were Elgar's only recordings to be made with the newly-formed BBC Symphony Orchestra and they ably demonstrate its virtuosity. (Interestingly, the first two Marches in this batch were only the second record of this orchestra to be issued. The first was Adrian Boult's record of Elgar's arrangement of Chopin's *Funeral March*, and one may speculate whether this might not have been found

¹ *The Cello and the Nightingales* (John Murray, 1985)

² *Edward Elgar: Memories of a Variation* (Oxford, 1937)

worthy to be given space somewhere in the "Appendix" to this issue). For Elgar's last recordings a return was made to the London Philharmonic Orchestra otherwise only utilised for the *Froissart* overture and the Op.10 *Contrasts* included in Vol.1. Elgar plays the *Serenade* with great affection (forty-one years after it was composed!) and something of the same sense of nostalgia pervades his performance of the Op.58 *Elegy*, bringing his recording career of nigh on twenty years to a close.

As an Appendix we are offered the two excerpts from *Caractacus* conducted by Lawrance Collingwood which Elgar directed by land-line from his sick-bed and which were issued posthumously by HMV in their Connoisseur Catalogue. The two performances of *Mina* included in this section represent a first attempt (unpublished previously) and a re-recording of this short piece dedicated to HMV's Fred Gaisberg. Elgar apparently disapproved of the fast tempo of the first (which he was too ill to conduct) and the reissue conducted by Haydn Wood was intended, presumably, to remedy this defect but it offers little variation in speed and is in fact slightly cut which accounts for the shorter duration than the first version. The set concludes with Sir Landon Ronald's only recording of a work by Elgar, the *Coronation March*, Op.65, an appropriate tribute to the composer who had been "an intimate and dear friend for twenty-five years"³. Allowing for the usual "noises off" to which we are now becoming accustomed, the overall technical standard of the transfers of these recordings is excellent. The accompanying booklet contains two most enlightening essays : by Anthony C Griffith, formerly of EMI, who writes interestingly of the "78 era" with which he was personally involved as recording engineer; and by Andrew Walter, the engineer responsible for the transfers to Compact Disc. There is also a commentary by Dr J N Moore on the particular works included in the Volume, and a reprint of an Essay on the Gramophone by Elgar himself.

David G.Michell

The Light of Life, Op.29.

Judith Harwarth, Linda Finnie, Arthur Davies, John Shirley-Quirk, London Symphony Chorus, London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Richard Hickox
Chandos CHAN 9208

A year ago it was *Caractacus*, this year *The Light of Life* and again I find myself comparing a new recording from Richard Hickox with the work's premiere recording from Charles Groves. This newcomer has a lot going for it - vivid recorded sound, clear enunciation from the choir, confident orchestral playing and yet I must confess to some disappointment. Somehow the whole, the product - and I use the word advisedly - is less than the sum of the parts. It's all very safe and polished but ultimately rather bland. In spite of individual details that delight, the blood doesn't race!

From the outset, the Prelude sounds very serious, almost severe, and even when the tune appears at G, it doesn't really smile - there's little of the warmth that is so apparent in, for example, Boult's recording. The *rubato* is rather overdone in the following bars but the Chandos sound opens up wonderfully with plenty of rich

³ Ronald : *Myself and Others* (Sampson Low, 1930)



Anthony Rolfe Johnson singing the title role in the CFP recording of "The Dream of Gerontius" in Liverpool, January 1993. (Photo: Selwyn Green © EMI Records)

organ sound well integrated into the texture. Both as Levites and Disciples, the male chorus sing with great precision and control. Full chorus and orchestra ensure a full-blooded opening to "Light out of darkness" underpinned by a rich and rumbling organ pedal and if the tension sags somewhat at the arrival of the fugal passage Elgar felt he ought to write then that is hardly Hickox's fault! However the female voices make a very beautiful and sensitive contribution a little further on at the words "Thou hast borne the sinner's sentence".

Judith Howarth is very fine as The Mother of the Blind Man riding triumphantly over the large orchestral sounds at "Lighten O lighten my eyes" in her first solo. "He went his way therefore" shows Linda Finnie as an effective Narrator and this movement is in general rather more energetic than some of the other parts. At D the chorus sing with great gusto "Since the world began" before the section culminates with that wonderful eight-part setting of "And the eyes of the blind shall see".

When Arthur Davies sings "Jesu! But thy name is all I know", you really do believe, such is the power and conviction that he brings to the part of the Blind man! However he does rather throw away the passage on p 63 of the vocal score when he declares "whereas I was blind, now I see" and the chorus "cast out" rather too politely - I would expect rather more of the mood of Gerontius' demons here. John Shirley-Quirk also appears on the Groves disc when he was in rather better voice and I think more sensitive in the great "I am the good shepherd" section, highlighting the dynamic contrasts more effectively.

As in the equivalent section of *The Banner of St George*, Hickox takes the final chorus at a very steady pace. For me it is just too pompous, too safe. It's just as well he doesn't slow up at all at the *allargando*, *molto maestoso* marking at H. To be fair neither does Groves. His basic pulse is identical, although surprisingly it does seem a little more animated even though the words of his chorus are nowhere near as clear. It is not just nostalgia that takes me back to a tape of Myer Fredman's BBC broadcast of the early seventies. It may not be so polished but it has energy, it has interest, it has enthusiasm. I have a great fondness for *The Light of Life*. This new disc is an acceptable account and gives pleasure but I don't think we yet have a recording that does full justice to this still under-rated piece.

John Knowles

Symphony no 1 in A flat, Op.55. Sea Pictures, Op.37.

Yvonne Minton (mezzo-soprano), London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Daniel Barenboim
Sony SMK 58929

During the mid-1970s Daniel Barenboim recorded the bulk of Elgar's orchestral output for CBS, and had it not been for his signing of an exclusive contract with DG there is every reason to believe he would have moved on into the choral repertoire; the London Philharmonic Choir were to perform and then record *The Spirit of England* under his baton, but after the move to DG was announced it was substituted by another (non-choral) work.



Vernon Handley recording "The Dream of Gerontius" in Liverpool last January (photo : Selwyn Green © EMI Records)

Barenboim's interest in Elgar was of course instigated by his wife Jacqueline du Pre's link with the *Cello Concerto*. He was still a relatively new conductor in those days, and it would be fascinating to hear him conduct Elgar now. I have to confess that I am frustrated by virtually all of his Elgar recordings. There are moments of supreme insight and beauty, which often throw new light on familiar passages; but there are also places where major aberrations occur; where the aim seems not so much to discover and portray the composer's intentions as to make a highly individualistic and idiosyncratic statement just to be different, and which makes little or no artistic sense. A classic example of this comes at the beginning of the symphony. The hushed opening leads into a beautifully restrained statement of the A flat motto theme; the *crescendo molto* bars are electrifying. But when we reach the full orchestra at fig.3 Barenboim moves into an *accelerando* which completely destroys the mood he has so carefully created, and which Elgar so obviously wanted (the score is actually marked *molto sostenuto* at this point). He injects a tension and unease into the music which diminishes the impact of the D minor *Allegro* some twenty bars or so later, especially as he takes this new section quite leisurely. Not surprisingly perhaps, the first movement finds it hard to recover from this onslaught; that it does so is a tribute to Barenboim's talent. There is some wonderfully expressive playing at the reprise of the second subject after fig.38; and although the climax at fig.44 is disappointing, the movement ends well. From here on there is little to quibble about; in fact, the middle two movements rank with the finest versions of this symphony, in my opinion. Barenboim certainly wears his heart on his sleeve and brings out plenty of emotion, but avoids the sort of self-indulgence found in some more recent recordings. (The engineers have suppressed the heart-felt groan from the conductor in the third bar of 96 which was clearly audible on the LP). There are lots of good things to admire in the Finale, with a real *p* as marked at the return of the march-like theme at fig.130; but I found the final pages a little too rushed.

I confess that I had not heard Yvonne Minton's version of *Sea Pictures* before. She is an experienced Elgar interpreter on record, appearing on Boult's *Kingdom* and Britten's *Gerontius*. There is a maturity and assurance about her singing, but her intonation is not always secure, and she is not as comfortable on the lowest notes as she is in the highest register. I could have done with more expression in the opening song, in which the sea, siren-like, lulls and woos the hearer. It calls for an atmosphere of mystery which is totally lacking here. The two short songs come off best, while "The Swimmer" is marred by a pause (unmarked) at letter G which breaks the flow of the song. Barenboim never allows the orchestra to overwhelm - in fact he is meticulous in his observance of the quieter dynamics, eg. the *ppp* one bar before H in the first song - and all in all he is a very sensitive accompanist.

With so many recordings of the symphony now available there is strong competition, even at mid-price. Barenboim would not be my first choice, although there are many delightful things in his recording. Much the same verdict can also be given for the *Sea Pictures*.

The Editor

Froissart, Op.19. In the South (Alassio), Op.50. Falstaff, Op.68.

London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jeffrey Tate
EMI CDC 754415-2

Falstaff has always seemed to me to be one of Elgar's most elusive works. I have heard performances by sympathetic Elgarians conducting great orchestras who play sublimely, yet the piece fails to convince. It is symphonic in design, as Elgar made clear in his description "symphonic study"; but as well as a careful overview, an interpreter of *Falstaff* must get to know this complex score in detail, for there are many pitfalls for the unwary.

I must confess that I approached this new recording with some reservation, for Jeffrey Tate's Elgarian pedigree is neither very long, nor in some quarters very distinguished. However, I was pleasantly surprised; here is a *Falstaff* to live with. Tate's interpretation is virtually free from the personal mannerisms which disfigured his recordings of the symphonies for so many critics. Elgar's markings are followed closely, but not slavishly, and this recording, made in St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, is both spacious and clear. The LSO play like demons, which is just as well, for Tate really drives them on occasions (for instance, the passage describing the battle, beginning at the *animato* fig.88). Tate seems to get to the heart of the work, and to bring out details which are often overlooked. I was reminded that much of his reputation has been gained in the opera house, and also that Percy Young once described *Falstaff* as "an opera without words". Its episodic nature, which seems to have been the downfall of some interpreters, has brought the best out of this conductor. Perhaps nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the final pages, "the decay of the merry-hearted one", as Elgar described it. *Falstaff* really does disintegrate, but Tate resists any temptation to overplay this scene; the final bars are curt and brutal, as they should be, and all the more effective for being so. My sole qualification, and it is a very small one, is the playing of the solo violin in the first Interlude. It is marked *cantabile e legato*, and should reflect the innocence and artlessness of the page boy, to contrast with the deviousness of the adult *Falstaff*. Here the playing is rather mannered, with unmarked *tenutos* and a general lack of *legato*.

The other two works are adequate without being special. Tate rather underplays *Froissart*; he refuses to indulge himself in the big tuttis, and there is a marked contrast in mood and pace in the central section (beginning at the *poco meno mosso*, letter I) which actually works quite well. However, the ending is a disappointment; Tate rushes the final section from seven bars after V (marked *accel. sempre al Fine*) and has to put in an unmarked *ritardando* on the triplet two bars after Z to prevent his orchestra from seizing up on the final *stringendo*.

Tate sets a furious pace, too, at the start of *In the South*, but it all sounds rather messy and hectic, instead of the exhilaration one should sense ("the joy of living", as Elgar put it). Although there are some excellent features - such as some very *grandioso* Romans - one senses the lack of total involvement that is so evident in *Falstaff*. To sum up: the competition in *Froissart* and *In the South* is very strong, and for definitive versions you would probably need to look elsewhere. But as already stated, there are few convincing *Falstaffs*, and this is a very fine one indeed,

well worth investigating.

The Editor

Piano Quintet, Op.84. String Quartet, Op.83.

Harriet Cohen (piano), Stratton String Quartet (recorded 1933)

Works for violin and piano played by *Josef Hassid and Joseph Szigeti.*

Dutton Laboratories CDLX 7004

Here is the perfect companion disc for the three-volume "Elgar Edition". The story of the recording of the *Quartet* and *Quintet* is well-known; how Fred Gaisberg arranged for them to be done in the autumn of 1933 to cheer up the composer during his final illness. The records were not released until after Elgar's death, but he was given pressings of them, and they brought him much joy. The recordings were transferred to LP and cassette some twelve years ago on the Cambridge label, but these new transfers from commercial pressings are in a different league. The clarity, definition and absence of surface noise are absolutely stunning - a wonderful advertisement for the CEDAR production system which has been developed "to eliminate scratches, crackle, hiss and other unwanted noises, without removing any of the original musical information". My only complaints concern a slight loss of treble edge to the sound, and excessive reverberation leading to a little sonic muddle in the louder passages which was presumably present on the original recording. There are also one or two fluffed piano chords and some roughness in the string playing at times, which we would perhaps not tolerate in a modern recording; but these are quite minor compared to the overall joy of listening to this disc. Apart from the outstanding quality of the transfers, these are wonderful performances, object lessons in how to perform Elgar. There is passion and commitment aplenty, but also a faithfulness to the composer's wishes, and a grasp of overall structure and flow which many modern performers would do well to study and emulate.

Three excellent fill-ups are Josef Hassid's 1940 *La Capricieuse*, which has also been released on Testament and was reviewed in the previous JOURNAL; and Szigeti's arrangements of two late piano pieces, *Serenade* and *Adieu*, from 1934. Michael J Dutton, engineer of the award-winning first Volume of "The Elgar Edition", has now set up his own label and is bringing out some fascinating re-issues of classic recordings. The Society's Chairman Andrew Neill has contributed the informative notes; and this record is simply a must for all Elgarians.

The Editor

CD Round-up

An Elgar record from someone described by Alice as "a brutal, selfish, ill-mannered boulder"? It can only be Albert Coates, Russian-born of English parents, and champion of Scriabin. His ignominious place in the Elgar story is due to his failure to give Elgar adequate rehearsal time for the *Cello Concerto* at its première in 1919, which prompted Alice's comment. Yet in 1929 Coates recorded Elgar's arrangement of Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue*, now available on a two-CD set "Albert Coates conducts, Vol.II" (Koch Historic 3-7704-2). Elgar had a poor opinion of Coates as a

conductor : after hearing him perform the *Fugue* in 1921, the composer commented that he "sat a little heavily on it". Coates certainly revels in the glorious richness of the orchestration, and I found his a very satisfying interpretation. He is less successful in quieter pieces; subtlety is not a word to describe his conducting, as Bernard Shore wrote of him : "Careful shading and detail are secondary to power and essential outlines". This mid-price set is good value, however, with over two-and-a-half hours of music including Wagner excerpts, *Don Juan* and *Tod und Verklärung*, and four of *The Planets*.

Elgar and Holst are also featured together on a disc in EMI's "Composers in Person" series, conducting the *Enigma Variations* and *The Planets*, both recorded in 1926 [CDC 754837-2]. The *Variations* is from the same transfer as for Vol.2 of "The Elgar Edition" [reviewed May 1993]; the Holst is new to CD. Obviously these are historical documents of a high order, and the issue is enhanced by an exemplary booklet which includes notes by John McCabe (himself a composer) and some interesting photographs.

"Favourite Elgar" [CDCFP 4627] is among the latest releases in Classics for Pleasure's "Favourite..." series. It is the sort of disc which is ideal for those discovering classical music for the first time (possibly via Classic FM), and comprises salon pieces, two *Pomp & Circumstance* marches, extracts from *The Wand of Youth* and the *Enigma Variations*, one of the *Sea Pictures*, and the slow movements from the two concerti. Performers include Robert Cohen, Nigel Kennedy, and Bernadette Greevy, and the conductors are Handley, del Mar, Hickox; and Owain Arwel Hughes, whose recordings of the two *Chansons* are issued for the first time, as far as I can tell. Sadly the notes will win no prizes, and contain two howlers; Elgar was apparently organist of St George's Cathedral in Worcester, and in 1910 conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra!

In the same series "Favourite British Music" [CDCFP 4611] contains *Chanson de Matin* and *Salut d'Amour* conducted by Lawrance Collingwood, and *Pomp & Circumstance no 1* by Barbirolli. This delightful record also contains works by Vaughan Williams conducted by Boult and Silvestri; Grainger by Vivian Dunn; Delius by Barbirolli; and Arne, Bridge, Coates and Walton by Groves.

Sony's series "British Pageant" also contains a compilation entitled "A Musical Heritage" (SMK 58936). The chosen repertoire appears to perpetuate the idea of a musical Dark Age in Britain; there are three suites by Purcell, and a Boyce symphony, but nothing between Handel's ubiquitous Queen of Sheba (1748) and Elgar's two *Chansons* written one hundred and fifty years later. Delius, Vaughan Williams and Warlock are the other modern composers, and the performers are the English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Raymond Leppard and José Luis Garcia. The recordings date from 1978 and 1981, and the performances are first rate. A third collection of British music is Decca's "The World of...British Music" [436 928-2 DWO]. It features twentieth-century composers in well-respected recordings, and is largely orientated towards folk-song. The Elgar items are Marriner's 1968 *Introduction & Allegro*, Kyung Wha Chung playing *Salut d'Amour*, and Solti conducting "Nimrod" and *Pomp & Circumstance no 1*.

Julian Lloyd Webber's latest anthology, "Cello Song" (Philips 434 917-2) sets out "to avoid too many old favourites while introducing listeners to some lesser known pieces which are also of great beauty". The disc is aptly named, for Lloyd Webber plays with a wonderful singing tone and elegance of expression (accompanied by John Lenehan on the piano). The repertoire is nearly all nineteenth- and twentieth-century, and includes Elgar's arrangement of his *Romance* for bassoon, which the cellist recorded some years ago with orchestral accompaniment.

The Editor

BRANCH REPORTS

LONDON Branch season got under way on 4 October when Dr Jerrold Northrop Moore was in conversation with Andrew Neill. Dr Moore's first hand acquaintance with so many who knew Elgar personally guaranteed a remarkable evening, which was greatly enjoyed by a very large attendance. It was a privilege too to welcome at this meeting Mrs Ursula Vaughan Williams.

Our guest in November was Christopher Fifield, author of the acclaimed biography of Hans Richter. Richter - "true artist and true friend" - was of course conductor of the premières of *Enigma Variations* and the *First Symphony*. But he was much else also, and his role in the career of Richard Wagner was perhaps even more significant. Another well-attended meeting heard Christopher Fifield do full justice to a remarkable musician - as well as let us inspect some wonderful memorabilia!

SOUTH-WEST. At the time of writing this report it is exactly one year since the Branch was re-formed. Our meetings have been reasonably well supported and the standard of presentations has been first-class. We are indebted to all those who have made the venture worthwhile. The present committee was re-elected with the addition of Richard Kirk, who has been responsible for our excellent posters, etc. We are now eagerly looking forward to 1994 events, when our speakers will be Dr Relf Clark, Ian Lace, Malcolm Walker, Prof Ian Parrott, Anthony Boden, and Eric Wetherill. We would be very pleased to see any member of the Society at any of our meetings, which all take place on the fourth Saturday of the month, usually at Bristol Music Club.

On 5 March is the Elgar Day School, when Dr Percy Young will present his "Elgar and Opera" (full details included with this JOURNAL). We are certain that this is an event *not* to be missed, bearing in mind that a complete performance will be presented at Cambridge in November. For those coming by car there is a large car park opposite the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Theatre, which costs £1 for the whole day.

NORTH-WEST. Our new season commenced with two talks on Elgar's contemporaries. Prof Ian Parrott's lecture on Peter Warlock was enlightened by illustrative examples on the piano; whilst in November Robert Elliott talked on the Symphonies of Vaughan Williams. Our December meeting will be the AGM and Christmas Social. The January meeting has yet to be confirmed. In March we will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the North-West Branch being based in Manchester. This will take the form of a celebration luncheon with a guest speaker

[see details elsewhere]. Any members wishing to join us should contact John Mawbey on 061- 485 6356. Our season will close with a recital by Cantilena.

SOUTHERN. Having been thoroughly entertained by Branch Treasurer Nigel Riches in October with his talk on Elgar and the Three Choirs' Festival, the 1993 season ended on a very high note (almost literally!) when Branch members Jennifer Nicholas (mezzo) and Phyllis Shipp (piano) gave a wonderful lecture recital on *Sea Pictures* during November. A large turnout of members and friends gained much insight not only into the music, but also into the poets. A very rewarding afternoon. The 1994 Season is set to roll in January with the AGM and a talk by Kevin Allen on the Jaeger/Parry letters. We are delighted that Parry's great-grandchildren, Kate Russell and Laura Ponsonby, will be attending this meeting. Another highlight will be performances of Elgar's music for Wind Quintet in March [see Concert Diary]. In May, the gardens of Little Langleys in Petersfield will be open to Society members. It was here that Elgar completed the orchestration of *The Music Makers*. If members outside the Southern area would like to attend, please contact the Branch Secretary, Kevin Allen.

YORKSHIRE's new season began on 27 September with a recorded 'Elgar Concert' provided by our Chairman, Robert Seager. Nothing taxing - no scores needed - just a pleasant programme of Elgar music to sit back and enjoy. Raymond Wood, who came on 11 October, is an extremely popular speaker who can always produce a fund of anecdotes on his subject. His 'Aspects of Elgar' gave us the expected crop of stories plus much rare Elgar, including extracts from a Russian-made *Second Symphony*. The surprise for many was a recording of Gracie Fields. Knowing of Elgar's encounter with her at Abbey Road, when he caught her shoeless and generally déshabillé while recording with Ray Noble and the "boys", it was fascinating to hear an impromptu recording made at a similar session, including Gracie's and Noble's speaking voices.

However, our highlight so far was our Annual Dinner, held at Donisthorpe Hall on 5 December, when - apart from a first-class meal - we enjoyed violin and piano music with our drinks on arrival, and music by a guitar duo to accompany coffee at the end. All was superbly organised by our member David Fligg, with help from students of Leeds College of Music. A memorable evening, which we would hope to repeat.

On 10 January we have Mark Jepson on "The Apostles", and on 7 March a third visit by Prof Ian Parrott with his talk on Peter Warlock.

WEST MIDLANDS. Our programme resumes on 12 February with a Lunch Party at 12 noon at "The Stables", 37 Albany Terrace, Worcester. The cost is £3.50 and bookings should be made with Walter Cullis.

The Branch AGM is at the same venue on 5 March at 2.15 (not 15th as stated in the last issue). It will be followed by a musical presentation by Michael Castle.

On 26 March there is a joint meeting with the Worcester Recorded Music Society at The Old Palace, Worcester, when Robin Hales will speak on "Wilhelm Stenhammar - Elgar's Swedish Contemporary"; and the season ends on 16 April with Prof Ian Parrott's "Warlock - Suicide, Accident, or Murder?" at Christchurch Hall, Avenue Road, Malvern.

Of concern to Londoners...

Apart from a nucleus of members who live in Greater London itself, a number who attend meetings of the London Branch live outside but work in London and stay in town after working hours in order to attend. There are a staunch few who come from as far afield as Bedford, Didcot, Canterbury and the South Coast specially for the meetings but there is a large "ghost" membership whose addresses appear to be in striking distance but who are never - or rarely - seen.

With such a variety of personal circumstances London Branch recently approached members for their opinions concerning what they want out of us. Are they deterred from joining us simply by reason of time and distance (admittedly these are for many the overriding considerations) or is the sort of programme not to their liking and have they any suggestions for improvements?

Needless to say the response, which came from 40% of the membership - a high proportion for a canvass of this kind, demonstrating an encouragingly high degree of commitment - embraced a wide variety of proposals for activities and the conduct of Branch meetings. Many would welcome return visits from speakers who have come to us in the past, whilst the support for a return visit to Brinkwells served to remind us that a quarter of the Branch membership have been with us for less than five years.

Interest was shown in the possibility of forming a Branch Library for the lending of books, records and tapes to members. This has entailed the appointment of a librarian, and a satisfactory means of storing material will need to be arranged, acquisitions coming hopefully in part at least from members' donations and presentations. Associated with this proposal is the matter of recording addresses by visiting speakers and making copies available to members through the library.

There was a majority in favour of making an earlier start to meetings. Not only would this encourage an earlier close (important for those having long distances to travel home) but it would also allow more time to be available for questions to speakers and also foster more of the social opportunities of meeting together. Furthermore, if a library is formed, it will be desirable to allow time for it to be used unhurriedly.

There is general concern regarding the best use to be made of the Richards Bequest. The list of suggestions was predictably long and varied and will give much food for thought to a sub-committee. One important proposal is the funding from this source of the occasional "special" lecture on a Saturday afternoon (as was given by Vernon Handley in 1992). Opportunities such as these allow for a more extended presentation than is possible at regular meetings and, combined with provision of tea, make for an instructive as well as enjoyable occasion free from the constraints already referred to. Thinking along those lines it may be said that the Committee is considering the possibility of a Branch dinner in 1994.

The London Branch Committee would like to thank all members who responded to the questionnaire and assure them that their likes (and dislikes!) will be borne in

mind in formulating future Branch policy. With these assurances in mind maybe some of the "ghosts" might be prevailed upon to make a tangible appearance in our midst where a warm welcome awaits them.

DGM

LETTERS

From : Diana McVeagh

Revision is now starting on The New Grove. I would be most grateful for corrections and additions to my Elgar entry, in its updated version in the reprint, Twentieth-Century English Masters.

From : Oliver Brooke

Am I alone in being disappointed by the Mackerras account of the vocal music from The Starlight Express? This recording has been widely acclaimed and was immediately promoted to desert island status by one critic. Yet to me the two soloists fall some way behind Valerie Masterson and Derek Hammond Stroud in Vernon Handley's wonderful 1976 recording, particularly Alison Hagley. There is simply no comparison between the two performances in the moving climax, where Handley is streets ahead, aided by a much more vivid analogue recording (the cymbals should really ring out at the end, and they do with Handley; with Mackerras they are barely audible).

It is time there was another live performance of this magical work. It was given in the 1970s by the Acorn Children's Theatre in London, with the score adapted for piano, flute, clarinet, violin, and cello. Could the Society help to promote another stage performance?

Collectors' Room



104 CRESCENT ROAD
NEW BARNET
HERTS EN4 9RJ
Tel: 081-440 2651

*78s, Record Catalogues
Books on Music, Programmes*

THE ELGAR SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1951

Registered as a Charity No.298062

President: The Rt. Hon. Lord Menuhin, O.M., K.B.E.

Chairman: Andrew Neill

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: £10.00 payable 1st January each year. The subscription includes membership for one other nominated person residing at the same address and sharing a single copy of the JOURNAL. Student members £5.00. Overseas members £10.00 payable in sterling. All subscriptions should be sent to the Hon.Treasurer, John Greig, Orchard Barn, Derrington Street, Barham, Canterbury, Kent CT4 6QB. Tel : 0227 831841. Deeds of covenant and bank standing order forms are obtainable from the Treasurer.

APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP should be sent to the Hon.Membership Secretary, David Morris, 2 Marriotts Close, Haddenham, Aylesbury, Bucks HP17 8BT. Tel : 0844 290742.

BRANCH MEMBERSHIP is included in the basic subscription for those who wish to be associated with one of the Society's Branches which are listed below.

BRANCHES AND BRANCH SECRETARIES :

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| LONDON
(South Kensington) | <i>David Bury, Flat 6, 19 Ringstead Road, Sutton,
Surrey, SM1 4SE. Tel: 081-661 2120.</i> |
| WEST MIDLANDS
(Worcester) | <i>Hywel Davies, 24 College Grove, Malvern WR14
3HP. Tel: 0684 562692.</i> |
| NORTH WEST
(Manchester) | <i>Mrs.Pat Hurst, 60 Homewood Road, Northenden,
Manchester, M22 4DW. Tel: 061-998 4404.</i> |
| EAST ANGLIA
(Norwich) | <i>All correspondence to the Branch Treasurer :
Leslie Reason, 10 Kenwyn Close, Kelling Road,
Holt, Norfolk NR25 6RS. Tel: 0263 713097.</i> |
| SOUTHERN
(Southampton/Portsmouth) | <i>Kevin Allen, 33 Wilson Road, Stamshaw,
Portsmouth PO2 8LE. Tel: 0705 696286.</i> |
| YORKSHIRE
(Leeds) | <i>Dennis Clark, 227 Tinshill Road, Leeds, LS16
7BU. Tel: 0532 671533.</i> |
| SOUTH WALES
(Swansea/Cardiff) | <i>Ken Wallace, 6 Ridgeway, Newport, Gwent NP9
5AF. Tel: 0633 267345.</i> |
| SOUTH WEST
(Bristol) | <i>Catherine Jones, 16 The Hornbeams,
Marlborough Drive, Frenchay, Bristol BS16 1PW.
Tel: 0117 9569237.</i> |

THE HON. SECRETARY OF THE SOCIETY is Carol Holt, 20 Geraldine Road, Malvern Worcs WR14 3PA. Tel: 0684 568822.