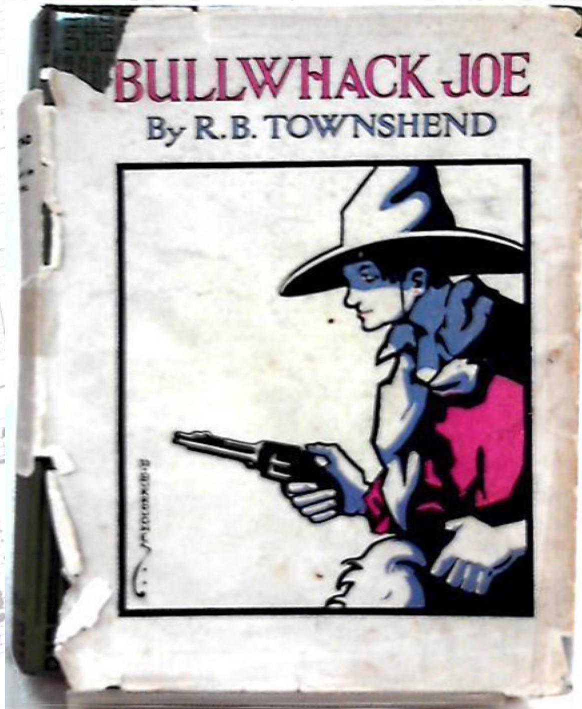
The Elgar Society

JOURNAL



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December 2021 Vol. 22, No. 6

Editorial 3

'Pictured Within' – Richard Baxter Townshend: Part One: The Tenderfoot 5
Kevin Allen

BB and EE: From loathing to respect: Britten and the music of Elgar 22
Andrew Neill

Book reviews 33
Relf Clark, David Green, Paul Chennell, Lewis Foreman

CD Reviews 46
Christopher Morley, Tully Potter, David Morris, Relf Clark,
Ruth Hellen, Steven Halls

Recording Notes 1920-1921 56
Kevin Mitchell

100 Years Ago... 58
Kevin Mitchell

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

Front Cover: Bullwhack Joe by R. B. Townshend published posthumously in 1925 and seen through the press by his widow Dorothea.

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Illustrations (pictures, short music examples) are welcome, but *please ensure* they are pertinent, cued into the text, and have captions.

The Editors have a policy of not publishing possible solutions to the 'hidden theme' in the Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma') or the 'Dorabella cypher'.

Presentation of written text:

Subheadings: longer articles benefit from judicious use of these.

Dates: use the form 2 June 1857. Decades: 1930s, no apostrophe.

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Numbers: spell out up to and including twenty, then 21 (etc.) in figures.

Quotations: in 'single quotes' as standard. Double quotes for quotes within quotes.

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>
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References: Please position footnote markers *after* punctuation – wherever possible at the end of a sentence.

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> Books: Author, *Title* (Place of publication: Publisher, year of publication), page[s]. Thus: Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), 199.
>
> Periodicals: Author, 'Title of article', *Title of periodical*, issue number and date sufficient to identify, page[s]. Thus: Michael Allis, 'Elgar, Lytton, and the Piano Quintet, Op. 84', *Music & Letters*, 85 (May 2004), 198.

End a footnote with a full stop, please, and never put a comma before a parenthesis.

Titles that are 'generic' in Roman: e.g. Violin Concerto. Others in *italics* (e.g. *Sea Pictures*; *The Musical Times*). Units within a longer work in single quotes, e.g. 'Sanctus fortis' from *The Dream of Gerontius*.

At the end of the essay, add about a hundred words about the author, please.

Full version of the 'Notes for Contributors' please see:
https://elgarsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Notes-for-Contributors_longer-version_February-2017.pdf

Editorial

There have been several studies of individuals closely associated with Elgar. In 1978 Percy Young produced a biography of Alice Elgar and in 2000 Kevin Allen completed his pioneering biography of August Jaeger. In 2012 Jeremy Hardie's monograph on Troyte Griffith appeared, and in 2013 came John Kelly's study of Alfred Rodewald. In this spirit we are beginning an occasional series on some of the lesser known 'variations' and, following his biography of the Worcester Cathedral organist Hugh Blair, Kevin Allen has now turned his attention back to the subjects of the *Variations* by looking in detail at Richard Baxter Townshend. The first of a two-part article considerably expands our knowledge of Townshend, whose remarkable adventures in Colorado, Texas and New Mexico are fascinating and give us a new understanding of this man whom we only know through one minute and eighteen seconds of music and the short note provided by Elgar.

At first sight there may appear to be little to connect Elgar (primarily a symphonic and orchestral composer) and Britten (foremost a vocal and operatic composer), yet both had to endure indifference and hostility to their early work, only later to be acclaimed and admired by foreign musicians and then taken up by the British Royal Family and aristocracy. Both received numerous honours, including the O.M., and in Britten's case a peerage, which Elgar sought in vain. Yet both were deemed to be 'outsiders', and the English musical establishment could not, at first, accept that their music was superior to that of their contemporaries; they both resented this. Both were thin-skinned and highly sensitive to adverse criticism and suffered (unwarranted) periods of self-doubt and depression, believing their music was not good enough, but sought solace from their chosen environment - 'I am firmly rooted in this glorious county' Britten said when given the freedom of Lowestoft in 1951.[1]

Elgar and Britten were both deeply concerned about how their works were to be performed and littered their scores with performance indications, in an attempt to help players achieve what each composer wanted – but did they tread a fine line between assisting and limiting the scope for freedom? As Nicholas Kenyon noted 'a common thread … in our musical psyche, as true of Elgar as it was of Britten, [is] that emotional repression in whatever form is an enormously creative force …'.[2]

That both were supreme masters of the art of composition cannot be doubted and their significance, importance and influence on English musical life cannot be overstated. Their magnetic personalities exerted considerable personal attraction, for it was said that when Elgar entered a room the atmosphere quickened. Dame Janet Baker wrote of Britten: 'When he walked into a room the air began to crackle; everyone became alive, became more than themselves'.[3]

Yet as a young man Britten misunderstood Elgar's music. The conceit of youth blinded him

---

1 Michael Kennedy, *Britten* (London: Dent, 1981), 1-2.

2 Nicholas Kenyon, 'The Outsider and the Insider' in Mark Bostridge ed., *Britten's Century: Celebrating 100 Years of Benjamin Britten* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), xvii.

3 Janet Baker, 'Working with Britten', Bostridge, 42.

to its importance, and he preferred – amongst others – Mahler and Berg. Yet over time its mastery gradually became apparent to him, leading to performances and recordings. In 1981 Michael Kennedy wrote of Britten's 'dramatic, quasi-operatic interpretation of … *Gerontius*, so far a unique example of a major English composer recording his view of a major work by another major English composer'.[4] Andrew Neill has traced this transformation, largely reflected in Britten's diaries and letters.

We recognise that in this issue our book reviews and some of the CD reviews cover non-Elgarian subjects. Whilst this should be the exception rather than the rule, and herein more honoured in the breach than in the observance, it is inevitable that on occasion new books dealing with twentieth-century contemporaries of Elgar, should be given prominence, even though their connection with him may be slight: the books clamour for our attention. Thus, we review three important new books on Gurney, Delius and Finzi. Dr Kate Kennedy's detailed biography of Ivor Gurney offers a full picture of this tragic figure whose life ended in the City of London Mental Hospital at Dartford in 1937 having been there since 1922. His importance as a song writer alone guarantees him a place in the pantheon of English composers. Frederick Delius lived much of his life outside the United Kingdom, but we still claim him as an English composer. Dr Jeremy Dibble has written a full-length study of Delius's music, which fills a significant gap in Delius studies. Diana McVeagh – who has extensively championed the music of Gerald Finzi – has edited a comprehensive volume of letters to and from the composer, from 1915 to 1956. At over a thousand pages this has truly been a labour of love and scholarship of the highest order, and adds significantly to our knowledge of Finzi, his friends and fellow composers. These books are reviewed by Relf Clark, David Green, Paul Chennell and Lewis Foreman.

Christopher Morley reviews a CD of British music by the CBSO conducted by Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla, which includes a performance of Elgar's *Sospiri*, together with works by Britten, Walton and RVW. He also reviews a CD (supported by the Society) from Chandos of Elgar songs with piano accompaniment from Julia Sitkovetsky and Christopher Glynn, which offers a rare opportunity to hear *Sea Pictures* in Elgar's piano arrangement. Tully Potter welcomes another performance, from the archives, of Jacqueline du Pré and Sir John Barbirolli in the Cello Concerto, recorded in Moscow in January 1967. Elgarians need no reminding of the artistry of these two magisterial musicians, whose knowledge and love of this music shines through. It is coupled with the Sibelius Violin Concerto played by Alfredo Campoli.

We consider four CDs from Albion Records: David Morris reviews a CD of archive American recordings of works by RVW. Relf Clark has listened to the piano arrangement of Walton's First Symphony and RVW's *Suite for Four Hands on one pianoforte*, Ruth Hellen writes of a disc of Vaughan Williams' Carols and Stephen Halls reviews Volume Three of the RVW Folksong series.

We warmly thank all our reviewers for their skill, knowledge and expertise and for devoting their time to make valuable contributions to the *Journal*, which is hugely appreciated by the editors.

The '100 Years Ago …' column is more detailed than usual, as we have endeavoured to fill out this period of Elgar's life with information that may not be readily available elsewhere, drawing particularly on Carice Elgar's valuable diaries when Edward's own diary falls silent.

Contributions for the April issue should be received no later than 15 February 2022.

Kevin Mitchell
With the Editorial Team of Andrew Dalton, David Morris and Andrew Neill

4 Kennedy, op.cit., 270.

'Pictured Within' – Richard Baxter Townshend: Part One: The Tenderfoot

Kevin Allen *introduces a series of occasional articles on the lives of some of the characters of Elgar's Variations Op. 36, and their spouses.*

> 'They did the Variations very well indeed at L'pool and my procession of friends dear to me was nice to see – I mean hear – but the sounds I have connected with them are very vivid (to me) and I feel the corporeal presence of each one as the music goes by . . .'
>
> Edward Elgar

> 'Every time I hear the Enigma I think them more like Bill and Dick and with the photographs they are truly more of a monument to those we love than anything in a cemetery.'
>
> Dora Townshend

> 'Damn and blast it, man! Can't you understand what I'm telling you?'
>
> 'RBT'

'The Editors have a policy of not publishing possible solutions to the 'hidden theme' in the Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma') . . .'[1] One sometimes wonders if the essential importance of that 'procession of friends dear to me' whose presences lie at the heart of the Variations has tended to be unfairly overshadowed by the apparently endless fascination exerted by the 'Enigma', the hunting down of which has long been a favourite occupation of Elgarians and others, an occupation sometimes bordering on the obsessive. Music is perhaps the most immediately suggestive of the Arts, and human beings are innately suggestible while at the same time drawn to problem-solve through rationality and logic. ('What one man can invent, another can discover' said Sherlock Holmes.) The 'enigma' hunt has produced results ranging from the scholarly to the absurd, especially those which rely on the idea of Elgar having written the theme to fit some kind of preconceived mathematical or scientific pattern or formula. It is possible to read some 'solutions' and wonder if we are dealing with a piece of music at all, and ask what possible relation such often laboured analyses can have to a work so rich in humanity and generous-spirited affirmations of friendship, affection and love. It is these qualities, surely, and not the existence of some kind of acrostic puzzle, that have established the Variations Op 36 as an enduringly popular staple of the world's repertoire of music. So often in my experience, when people talk about the Variations, it is

1 A recent addition to the 'Notes for Contributors' to this Journal, although it has been the *de facto* policy for many years.

RBT as 'Cherub' drawn by Dorothea Townshend in 1882 (from *The Tenderfoot in New Mexico*)

with a smile on their faces. The pictured friends may be long dead, but Elgar has made them into universal, even archetypal figures and in listening to the music we are hearing ourselves reflected through the sounds he has connected with them. Many of these sounds take us straight into one aspect of what we remember most immediately about friends and their personal styles – their voices. Think of Dorabella's stutter, August Jaeger's 'long summer evening talk', and Richard Arnold's 'serious conversation'. We hear his laughter, too, as we hear Winifred Norbury's. Elgar's homecoming whistle, William Meath Baker's slammed door and George Robertson Sinclair's barking dog add an endearing element of domesticity to the sound-picture, as does the presence of the piano, a standard fixture in so many Victorian homes, as heard in Hew David Steuart-Powell's 'characteristic diatonic run' and Troyte Griffith's 'maladroit essays'.

Elgar himself explained, albeit briefly, a great deal of this background,[2] and writers of programme notes have perforce relied on his account ever since, endlessly recycling the same minimal amount of information to such an extent that evidently some have felt a need to embroider. Authors of sleeve notes, in particular, have perpetrated some notable imaginative flights. Richard Arnold, an academic failure sent down several times from Balliol, was 'a scholar in his own right' according to one writer, and 'an earnest young philosopher-poet who played in the small orchestra Elgar conducted' according to another. Isabel Fitton has been described as having 'learning difficulties', and the serious-minded and formal Winifred Norbury was 'a light-hearted lady of

2 Edward Elgar, *My Friends Pictured Within* (Novello 1946).

the older generation'. The devoted naturalist and collector Basil Nevinson was an 'eminent cellist' and 'the inspirer of the later cello concerto', while the Wagner devotee, Alpinist and philanthropist William Meath Baker was 'an eccentric country gentleman' and 'a typical country squire'. The slightly-built, tubercular August Jaeger, who probably never mounted a horse in his whole life, was said to be 'a keen huntsman', and the quiet and scholarly Arthur Troyte Griffith has been variously and erroneously described as a 'boisterous character' and 'practical joker' who went to Elgar for piano lessons.

Leaving the 'Enigma' itself and such howlers aside, we need perhaps to be reminded that the portrait gallery of the Variations represents a range of interesting and accomplished individuals in their own right, many of whose stories remain comparatively little known. I hope these notes may make them and their 'corporeal presences' more real and vivid, enhance the listener's experience and enjoyment, and at the very least, provide some fresh matter for those apparently hard-pressed writers of sleeve notes. The remarkable, wonderful man who is the subject of the Third Variation is another who has suffered somewhat at their hands, being represented as yet another 'eccentric country gentleman', or conversely as 'a donnish figure'. He was a scholar with connections to both Oxford and Cambridge, but 'donnish' in any conventional sense he most certainly was not. Once again it was the nature of his voice that struck Elgar's ear. Best leave it to the composer -

> Richard Baxter Townshend whose Tenderfoot books are now so well known and appreciated. The Variation has a reference to R.B.T.'s presentation of an old man in some amateur theatricals – the low voice flying off occasionally into 'soprano' timbre. The oboe gives a somewhat pert version of the theme, and the growing grumpiness of the bassoons is important.[3]

Those amateur theatricals took place one Christmas in the 1890s at the imposing Hasfield Court in Gloucestershire, the home of Townshend's brother-in-law, William Meath Baker. With his curly hair, blue eyes, ruddy cheeks, curious voice and love of unusual clothing, Townshend would have stood out in any company, so much so that with characteristic bluntness Rosa Burley described him as 'something of an oddity' looking 'as much like a woman as a man'.[4] In fact Townshend brought with him a range of life-experience in a man's rough world, far outside those of his fellow-guests on that occasion, a man interesting and unusual enough to appeal strongly to Elgar's unconventional side.

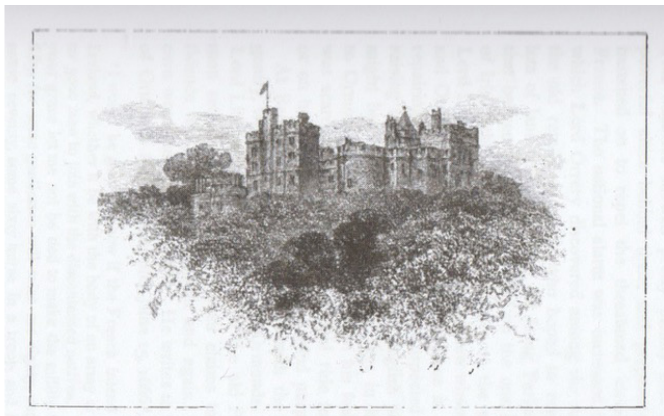
Ireland and Bath

Townshend was born in 1846 at Derry House, County Cork, the eleventh and last child by his second marriage of the Reverend Chambre Corker Townshend, a descendant of Colonel Richard Townesend (later generations have adopted Townshend or Townsend entirely at preference), an officer in Cromwell's Irish Army, who was subsequently pardoned on the Restoration.[5] On retirement the Colonel, having made extensive purchases of land, built a small castle in a village a few miles from Skibbereen, and settled down to found a remarkable dynasty of Protestant Irishmen whose members graced the Law, the Armed Forces, the Church, Medicine and Academia for generations.

3 Elgar, op.cit.

4 R. Burley and F.C. Carruthers, *Edward Elgar, The Record of a Friendship* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), 122.

5 The extensive Townshend Family Website has proved a valuable source of information.



Castletownshend, County Cork, from *An Officer of the Long Parliament* by Richard & Dorothea Townshend (Frowde, London: 1892).

Many emigrated and to this day there are Towns[h]ends to be found in England, America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Chambre Corker, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, was one of the fifth generation, and was renowned for his piety and charity to the poor at the time of the cholera epidemic of 1832 and the potato famines of the 1840s, setting up soup kitchens and shops to sell Indian corn, and creating employment schemes. He died after contracting scarlet fever, when Richard Baxter was seven years of age. The youngster had been warmly welcomed as a boy among eight sisters, and his mother remembered the delight with which he was cradled in his father's lap and how the 'dear child' would dance on the long table after dinner, while his 'little curly head made such a pretty picture'. The distinctive hairstyle remained, as did a strong moral framework in evidence throughout all his later adventures, derived from a close and affectionate Christian family background. And perhaps Richard was not too young to have received a fatherly introduction to the classical languages in which he later excelled.

Richard's numerous siblings, especially his sisters, would go on to develop their own talents, often of a broadly artistic kind. Marianne, the eldest, became a talented pianist and linguist; Susan was a photographer who exhibited at the Annual Exhibitions of the Royal Photographic Society, while Alicia was an accomplished artist who studied at the Slade School. Isabella studied painting in Italy and became a partner in an interior design business; in 1869 she had been one of the first five women at Hitchin College (later Girton College) Cambridge where she met the Fabian and Suffragette Emily Gibson, her brother Chambre's future wife. None of the brothers followed their father into the Church; Chambre trained as an architect after taking his degree at Trinity College, Cambridge, but lacked the drive to succeed in business and spent periods abroad in order to economise. The eldest, Nathaniel, began his career in banking before becoming Secretary to Lord Strathrain and later to his brother Sir William Rose, Clerk to the House of Commons.

On his father's death in 1852, Richard and all his siblings were put under the guardianship of his mother, Eliza, their maternal grandparents and an aunt, until they came of age. The children were each bequeathed by their father an equal share of £2,000; they would inherit more substantially on Eliza's death in 1906 but meanwhile there seems to have been sufficient to provide a comfortable start in life. Under the terms of the Reverend Chambre Corker Townshend's will, the imposing Derry House and its many acres were left to Horace Payne Townshend, the only son of his first marriage.[6] Eliza found it convenient therefore to remove her brood to another family property, in England, a house at Rodney Place, Clifton. The area offered opportunities for exploration and adventure, as Richard remembered later in a letter to a nephew, preserved in the Gloucestershire Archives.

> Beautiful indeed it is, and I saw it when I was a little bit older than you, nearly 60 years ago, when we all lived at Clifton. My brother Chambre, then about 25, and some of my sisters and I spent the day wandering about the Wye cliff and then the sisters went home by the steamer that ran to Bristol and Chambre [and I] started to walk. We walked down to the Aust Ferry where the Romans used to cross the Severn, and night was already falling and there was a great fog. All we could see was the brown water running down under the fog and on the desolate shore a tall post bigger than a telegraph post with a bell hung at the top and a rope to it. So we tolled the bell awhile and sat down and waited in the growing dusk, and at last out of the fog appeared a great sea-boat rowed by three men and this was the ferry. So we got in and were rowed across the brown water through the fog; how far across it was we could only guess but I daresay it was 400 yards or more: and on the East side of the river was the house of the ferryman and an old pub, where we got some bread and cheese for supper, and then we walked home to Clifton, some 12 or 15 miles I fancy, and got there in the middle of the night: but somebody was waiting up for us and let us in and found our beds at last. It was a great day and I have never forgotten it.

Cambridge and Wimbledon

Richard attended Repton School where he gained a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he spent four years, graduating with a second-class Classics degree in 1869. His curly locks, together with blue eyes and curiously smooth pink cheeks (he never succeeded in producing a moustache or beard) gained him the nickname of 'Cherub'. His unusual and attractive appearance would prove no disadvantage in life, smoothing his way in several potentially awkward situations; people took to him. 'Lord, man, if only I had your mug!' was the admiring comment of a professional gambler Townshend would encounter later in America. Sporting success being as important as academic, he early demonstrated his love of games at Repton with prizes for fives and rowing, and again at Cambridge as a member of the First Trinity Boat Club. He is recorded too as joining the College debating society, 'Magpie and Stump', (as would William Meath Baker of Hasfield Court, Gloucestershire, his future brother-in-law, although their Trinity careers did not overlap). The 'Magpie and Stump' society (presided over by a stuffed example of the bird in question, appropriately perched) offers a flavour of the Cambridge undergraduate life of those days, being more of a social than a debating society, affording members opportunities to meet to share opinions while enjoying snuff, coffee, biscuits and port. Townshend remembered encountering Maurice Kingsley, son of Charles, at Cambridge, and, in an indication of the future, meeting Ally Hodges, a mining engineer. But his University days seem to have been more marked by sporting mishaps than anything else. A gymnasium accident put him on crutches for a month – resulting in 'crutch races' round Trinity's New Court with a fellow-sufferer – and a fall from a hired horse just before his Finals proved a serious matter. The horse bolted and Townshend landed on his head, suffering concussion and an inheritance of persistent headaches.

Two further minor adventures of Richard's life at this time might indicate further reasons for the family's decision to base themselves in England. A short biography of him which appeared in the *Oxford Times* stated

6 Horace's eldest daughter Charlotte became Mrs Bernard Shaw in 1898

> He has a lively recollection of the Fenian times, as in 1867, being then an undergraduate, he found himself one night, while on a walking tour near Inchigoelish, the prisoner of a party of Fenians at a mountain shebeen. They were civil enough, however, and let him go after a short time on being satisfied that he was only a harmless tourist. Curiously enough he was arrested as a Fenian the next year by the police in the north of Ireland, while on a boating expedition. They were equally civil, and on being shown his Rob Roy canoe, were satisfied that the invasion of Ireland by canoeists was a peaceful one.[7]

The Townshends had traditionally been conciliatory in their approach to the troubles.

> As landlords and Protestants they have naturally been identified with what was till recently the ruling class in Ireland, but in the time of the terrible penal laws the head of the family held as a nominal owner some £40,000 worth of property for his Roman Catholic neighbours, acting as a friend to save their estates until the day when the lands could be restored to them in safety. Later on, in the year of the rebellion of 1798, Mr. Townshend's grandfather saved the people around him from the severity of the soldiery in their search for arms by mounting the pulpit of the Roman Catholic chapel, and telling the "boys" that if they would bring their pikes by night to a certain field of his, he would ask no questions, and have then safely disposed of. They took his advice, and he had whole boat-loads of those tell-tale evidences of rebellion taken out to sea, and sunk in deep water.[8]

The anecdotes were pendants to an article, 'The Attempts to Win Irish Independence by Force of Arms' that Richard had written for the newspaper, with certain by-elections imminently due in Ireland, and Gladstone's Second Home Rule Bill a few months away. He gave an account of the development of the Fenian Brotherhood, its training and structure, with particular emphasis on Irish-American support, leading up to the unsuccessful rising of 1867. He approved the former Fenian Michael Davitt's renunciation of violence, but wondered whether he could be trusted to keep extremists in check, and concluded, 'That is the question which every elector should ask himself seriously, if he desires to retain the integrity of the United Kingdom'. There can be little doubt where the Townshend sympathies lay and it is clear that Richard preferred to live outside his native country, returning only to visit. It is clear that he would come to divide his life between America, Worcestershire and Oxford, leaving Ireland largely behind him.

In 1867 while he was at Cambridge, Richard and three of his sisters took out a 99-year lease on 12, Ridgway Place, a substantial detached house in a quiet cul-de-sac in Wimbledon, south-west London, where they were joined by his mother, Eliza, who sold the Clifton home. It provided a base for Anne's nursing training, Susan's photographic exhibitions, and proximity to Chambre and Horace, who both spent time in London. The scholarly sisters were also involved with the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching, tickets for a lecture at a Wimbledon hall being available from 'Miss Townshend, Ridgway Place'. The area was largely rural in those days – it boasts its extensive Common still - and Ridgway Place was surrounded by fields which sloped down to the railway station. It was the family base from which Richard would plan his future on coming down from Cambridge, a plan influenced by his need to establish a career as a younger son, a taste for the outdoor life, and his friendship with Ally Hodges, now mining in America. Another factor may have been the influence of a family friend, Sir Francis Bond Head, a former Governor of Upper Canada and miner in Argentina, who had written several graphic accounts of his travels in South America.

7 11 February 1893.

8 Ibid.

Enter the Tenderfoot

So it was that in the summer of 1869 Townshend set sail for America. He went no doubt equipped with some letters of introduction, and financed by the interest on his inheritance and an allowance. New York was his first port of call, but he found his headaches exacerbated by its sweltering summer heat. By chance he came across a recently-published book, *Colorado, The Switzerland of America,* which led him to hope that the cool air of the Rocky Mountains - Colorado is the only US State entirely 1,000 metres elevation above sea level - would provide a cure, and, for a young man with a taste for outdoor activity, seeking adventure and a path in life, a great deal more perhaps. The famous Rockies, some of which remained snow-tipped all year round, were only one feature of a mixed and dramatic landscape of forests, deep canyons, rivers, deserts and plains, territory rich in mineral deposits including gold and silver. With a population of just forty thousand inhabiting an area of 104,000 square miles, Colorado offered every scope for determined prospectors and frontiersmen to develop the infrastructure of mines, mills, cattle ranches and farms, to build roads and towns, and to make fortunes in the process. But if the opportunities were great, so were the difficulties and dangers: extremes of weather, disaffected native tribes and heavily armed outlaws.

Accordingly, nothing loth and fully imbued with the energy and optimism of youth, Townshend set out for Colorado, taking the newly-opened Union Pacific Railway all the way to Cheyenne, where he boarded the four-horse Wells Fargo stage coach for Denver. He had with him three hundred dollars in a body belt, and a twelve bore, two-barrelled shotgun. Aware of his painfully evident status as a 'tenderfoot' – a naïve newcomer – Townshend wasted no time in his efforts to become *au fait* with frontier life, to ask questions and to learn from his experiences. A friendly fellow-passenger on the train warned him of the dangers of the gambling and drinking life and its consequences, as they passed a forest of wooden crosses on the outskirts of a town. He recommended going 'well-heeled' with a pistol rather than a rifle, and the sight of two Indians on horseback prompted him to relate the story of how a large party of Sioux had once succeeded in derailing a train and taking many scalps. 'I really had to put up my hand to my head to feel if my own hair was still quite safe' Townshend remembered. His education continued at Cheyenne. Killing some time before the departure of the stage coach, he innocently wandered into a large tent announced as 'Prof MacDowell's Museum' only to find it a front for a gambling den boasting a collection of pornographic 'what the butler saw' stereoscope machines.

Once arrived at Denver, Townshend followed up his contacts but mounted no major enterprise, for Ally Hodges' report of his mining project was discouraging. More pleasing was a meeting with the Manager of a local bank, who advised him that the current interest rate was 3% *per month*. Finding that the Colorado air really did improve his headaches, he made sure to see as much of the country as he could in these early days, equipping himself with a .36 calibre muzzle-loading Colt six-shooter and embracing the open-air life of camp-fire cookery and sleeping under the stars. After a week's fishing expedition with a friend, he spent some time accompanying General MacEachran, a Civil War veteran turned travelling Inspector for a Land and Coal Company, looking after the two mules on which they depended for transport. He then joined forces – helping cook and do general camp-work for the payment of a dollar per week – with a peripatetic photographer, Mathews, on a commission from *Harper's Weekly* to photograph the State Governor opening a new Agency for the Ute Indians, angered by the white man's encroachments on their reservation. Their journey was full of incident, one of which says something about how Townshend and his background were seen in his new world. Mathews roused him from sleep one night with news of a dying Indian baby whose family thought he might be able to save the child. Townshend protested that he was

not a doctor, only to receive the rebuke, 'Didn't they learn you anything of any use back there at Cambridge College?' And difficulties awaited at the meeting with the warlike Utes, who had gathered in intimidating numbers at the site of the new Agency building. The Governor negotiated a settlement with the aid of a translator, and the Ute chief suggested a display to celebrate. It developed into a none too subtle display of raw power, for in the event 800 Indians in full war paint undertook various manoeuvres for the benefit of the Governor's party before mounting a direct charge at them, firing their guns into the air. All held their breath (and the Governor's wife fainted) before the charge was called off at the last moment. That evening the Utes held a 'scalp party' as the result of a recent feud with some unlucky Cheyennes, one of whose braves they had killed and scalped. They captured the man's six-year-old son, and Townshend never forgot the sight of the poor child being forced to dance at the foot of the pole from which his father's scalp dangled.

Danger from the native peoples, especially the brutal Utes, was a real and continuing factor in Townshend's life in America and he early learnt to be wary of them. His writings contain frequent references to 'the torture', and he recounted a story of how the Governor managed to negotiate the last-moment release of two captured Cheyennes. They would have been stripped naked and tied to stakes, surrounded by piles of firewood, had lit splinters inserted under their fingernails, and slowly roasted and literally eaten alive, the Utes cutting off slices of flesh while the tribe enjoyed the whole process as an entertainment. Not the least memorable aspect of the episode to Townshend was the near-total impassivity with which the Cheyenne pair confronted their possible fate and subsequent release.

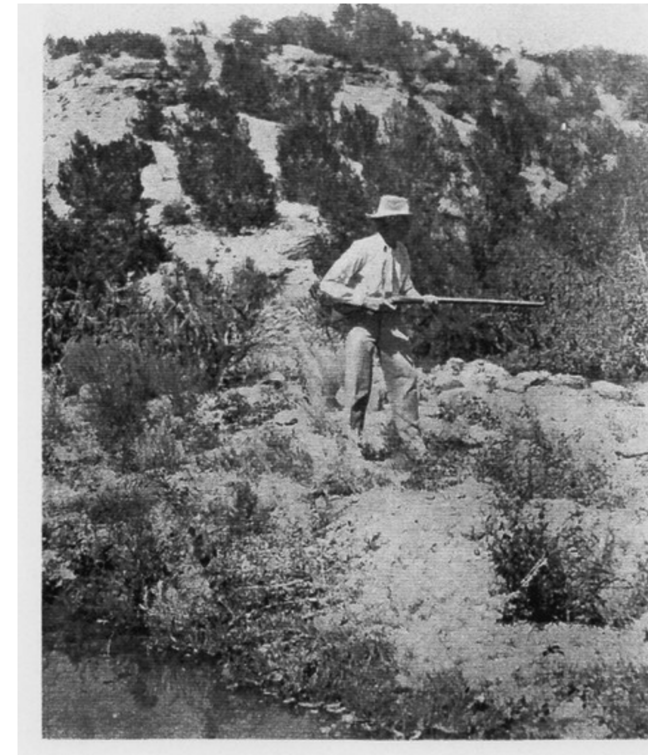
With such increasing knowledge and experience of frontier life, it could not have taken Townshend long to shake off the 'Tenderfoot' persona, a process intensified when, on parting company with the photographer, he bought a horse and ventured into Evans, a new, rough town built for railroad navvies, where he was invited at gunpoint to have a drink. And on investigating a large crowd on the outskirts of town, and being asked in no uncertain terms for the loan of his horse, he found himself assisting at a lynching, an episode memorably described in a chapter of one of his later books. Townshend's new picket rope, slung over a branch, was commandeered for the noose, and the unfortunate murderer was placed on the horse, which was made to gallop forward, leaving the man swinging. It was made clear to Townshend that his participation, being forced, attracted no blame, and his mount was returned to him that day, although he had to wait for the picket rope. He could not resist returning to the improvised gibbet that evening as the sun was setting on the horizon, while 'in the foreground stood the withered cotton-wood with its ghastly fruit. The work was done'. As so often in his reminiscences of his experiences, the university-educated Townshend was moved to consider the matter from a historical perspective. A keen student of the Civil War, he wondered if Mr President Bradshaw's court which sentenced Charles I was in fact any more legal than the lynch mob he had just seen. 'These Americans are the real true-bred sons of those old Commonwealth men' he wrote. He acknowledged the immediate effect of the hanging, which resulted in many bad characters leaving town, but later came to see how quick summary-justice interfered with the ordinary law and stimulated gun violence. And he put his finger on an all too familiar vicious circle:

> Every thief becomes a potential murderer, and goes armed. Peaceful citizens arm themselves in defence of their lives and property, and, as collisions will occur, crimes of violence naturally abound. The remedy is worse than the disease.[9]

9 RB Townshend, *The Tenderfoot in Colorado* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1923), 130. I have gratefully relied on this book, together with Townshend's other books of reminiscences, *The Tenderfoot in New Mexico* (1923) and *Last Memories of a Tenderfoot* (1926) for background information throughout, and the brief quotations are taken from them.

Colorado, New Mexico and Colorado Again

Gradually Townshend was leaving his tenderfoot days well behind him. 'I was very young in those days' he wrote, 'and my great ambition was to qualify as a regular out-and-out frontiers-man'. About a year after his arrival in Colorado, he established a cattle ranch on the Great Plains with a partner, ultimately buying him out and setting up on his own. He was able to employ a team of cowboys to manage a modest herd on a range 40 miles across, selling to miners in the mountains. Adventures and misadventures continued, not least as a result of extremes of weather. Townshend remembered how storm-winds could cause the cattle to stampede, and related the story of how 1800 sheep, and the shepherd, had once been blown off a precipice. And Townshend himself had a close shave late one evening about a mile from his ranch when he was kicked in the leg by an unbroken horse, breaking the bone. Faint with pain and loss of blood, he confessed to an overwhelming desire to shoot the animal, but contented himself by just firing a round to scare the maddened animal away. Attempting to crawl to the ranch, he passed out, awaking next morning to find a large crow hopping close by and a pack of coyotes a little further off. Townshend fired four of his remaining five bullets to scare them away – he knew he had to keep one for himself in case he was discovered by Indians – but they had scented blood and remained lurking. He spent a long, uneasy day unable to move until help arrived just before darkness fell. He wrote later of how the wolves 'licked their chops, and the crows croaked their impatience as they walked to and fro'.



RBT and shotgun above Jemez (from *The Tenderfoot in New Mexico*)

Townshend would pass some four years ranching altogether, but even in this short period, he began to find the increase in Colorado's population and the pace of change unsettling. During the ten-odd years of Townshend's life in and around Colorado, its population would increase by nearly 400%. Larger and larger herds were being developed and he found his best herdsmen leaving for them. Accordingly, and nothing loth to try something new, he sold up and invested in two good waggons to travel due south to New Mexico, with a stock of sheepskins, pelts and blankets to trade there. The country was US territory, having been sliced off Old Mexico after the 1846 war. Arrived at the adobe village, or Pueblo, of Jemez, Townshend lodged with a white man, John Miller, an official of the Indian department. Townshend settled happily, finding the people peaceful and industrious. Once again his striking looks gained him a welcome, his rosy cheeks and blue eyes earning him the sobriquet of 'Poshiyemo' – 'Dawn God'. His later writings betray the close interest he began to take in the lives of the Pueblo Indians, their ritual hunts and dances and other religious customs including the mounting of a procession of flagellants and occasional crucifixions with cords. Sometimes the rituals were so sacred and private that he and Miller were advised to remain indoors during them. 'You no come out today' he would be told, and he could not but comply. 'They treated me with hospitality' he wrote 'I could only return it by courtesy'. But he thought the rituals an introduction to the 'dark soul of paganism' all the same.

After two years of Pueblo life, news started to filter through of a big 'gold rush' back in Colorado, and Townshend confessed that he and Miller became more and more restless and obsessed with the idea of 'having a try'. Townshend wrote of his years of a 'half-savage life' and of a yearning to return to civilisation, art, and books. Gold would pay for that return, and he and Miller travelled far in the search for it, enduring various episodes of weather and shortages of supplies, but without ever finding any significant amount. Their final 'stake' yielded possibilities, but by the time they found it winter was setting in. Rather than leave the site for another to discover, Townshend decided to sit tight, to be on the spot to resume panning come the Spring thaw. He built a pine-brush shelter, found plenty of firewood for cooking and warmth, and shot the occasional antelope for food. Good blankets and a buffalo-skin robe (it was later installed on his wife's sofa) gave some protection against frost, snow and wind in a country where the mercury was said to freeze every winter. But the privations proved in vain, and when work finally became possible, there was no gold worth having.

Sometime in February 1877 Townshend had ventured out to the nearest prospectors' camp at Pagosa Springs, probably for stores. Here he found a letter from his cultivated sister Marianne, written the previous May. It referred to an earlier, unanswered letter with which she had enclosed a book; Townshend now hastened to reply. The book remains unnamed, but seems to have been connected with some degree of anxiety on his sister's part over the possible effect of the rough life on Townshend's religious thinking. He began with an apology, and continued with a confession that he was disinclined to 'enter on the subject'.

> I have never had an opportunity to read Swedenborg but I had a conversation on the subject with an American gentleman (a Harvard man) who was acquainted with his works which much interested me. I had better say at once that I do not feel able or willing to attempt a correspondence on the subject of personal religion but that you may not distress yourself by thinking of me as an enemy of Christ. I will say that the mental attitude of Gibbon and Voltaire revolts me even more than the doctrine of the Ultramontanes; and as I have spent a great part of the last two years among bigoted Catholics I know some thing of how they can be.

A formal image of RBT (Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford)

Marianne's letter had raised the question of her brother's return to England; hoping for 'pay gravel' on the resumption of his panning efforts, Townshend stalled.

> Surely surely I will hasten home as soon as I wisely can but I think it is better to wait a little longer and then perhaps be able to come for good than to throw up what I am at and come knowing that I must soon strike out again . . . please excuse these blots: the roof of the shanty is leaking and some splashed on the paper.[10]

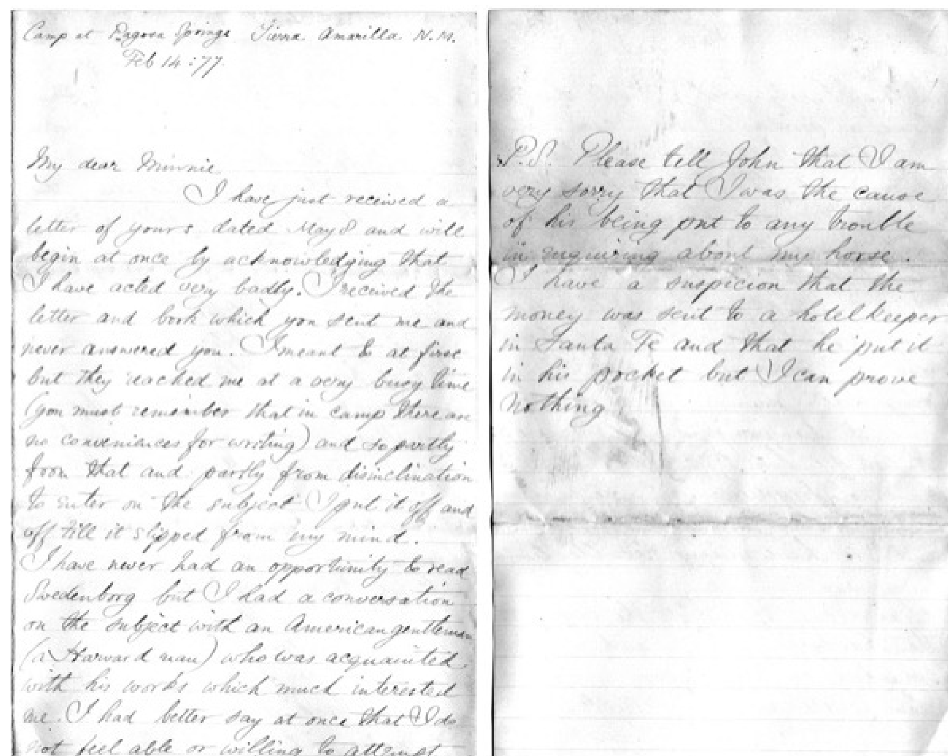
Wimbledon and a Policeman Without a Gun

But with the ultimate failure of his gold prospecting a few months later, and his own desire to taste the old life again, Townshend changed his mind, arriving at the family home in Wimbledon in early July 1877. With a mother's fond eye, Eliza Townshend wrote of him to a nephew–

10 The letter is headed 'Camp at Pagosa Springs, Sierra Amarilla, New Mexico' and dated 14 February 1877. I am grateful to the late Mike Skinner for making a copy of the autograph available.

‘And I suppose you have heard . . . of the safe return of our own dear wanderer. On Tuesday last “Uncle Dickie” returned at long last from his 8 years wandership in America. It was a most delightful surprise to us all . . . he is wonderfully little altered in the face, & every day seems more exactly like his old self, only his voice is deeper, & his tones & accent rather American, but that will soon wear off. He is we think taller, & certainly broader in the shoulders but he is not stout in figure – tho’ his face is full & rosy as ever. Indeed he has a fine bronzed complexion after his long out-door life. & no wonder. But he has not alas! succeeded in cultivating an atom of hair on his face, which we all lament over, for a moustache or beard would suit him grandly. He is still a “Cherub.” He is so happy to be at home once more, and we are all, you may be sure, delighted to have him, & we hope he will take a good long holiday with us before making up his mind as to his future. His astonishment at our fast London life, rushing about in trains & hansoms &c., after the contrast of his, affords us great amusement. You will laugh to see his “Rocky Mountain Boots”, & to hear him say it was “so many years, since he wore gloves, he had not a notion what size he took”! His 3 great striped sleeping Blankets are most useful to lie on in the garden.[11]

A letter from Pogosa Springs (Mike Skinner’s archive)



Camp at Pagosa Springs Tierra Amarilla N.M.
Feb 14 : 77.

My dear Minnie
I have just received a letter of yours dated May 8 and will begin at once by acknowledging that I have acted very badly. I received the letter and book which you sent me and never answered you. I meant to at first but they reached me at a very busy time (you must remember that in camp there are no conveniences for writing) and so partly from that and partly from disinclination to enter on the subject I put it off and off till it slipped from my mind.
I have never had an opportunity to read Swedenborg but I had a conversation on the subject with an American gentleman (a Harvard man) who was acquainted with his works which much interested me. I had better say at once that I do not feel able or willing to attempt

P.S. Please tell John that I am very sorry that I was the cause of his being put to any trouble in enquiring about my horse. I have a suspicion that the money was sent to a hotel keeper in Santa Fe and that he put it in his pocket but I can prove nothing.

11 Gloucestershire Archives 1240.

The blankets led to an amusing episode when Townshend found himself unable to sleep one hot summer evening and stole out into the garden with them ‘to sleep the sleep of the cowboy and prospector’. He was soon aroused ‘by a shake from a none too gentle hand’, that of a policeman. ‘Happily this was a country where no one carried or needed to carry a gun, not even a policeman’ Townshend wrote, and managed to convince the man that he was a son of the house. But all the same he humbly gathered up his rugs and went indoors again. The incident set him thinking. ‘So this was dear old England’ he wrote. ‘Is it to be wondered at that part of me turned to the Rocky Mountains again?’ The feeling was understandable, but there was more to it than that; ‘Also very badly did I want to make a bit of money, if only it were possible, for I had hopes of being able to get married in case I could fix things up right’. It seems that, during the year that he spent in England, Townshend met and came to an understanding with Laetitia Jane Dorothea Baker, a school friend of one of his sisters. Dora, as she was usually known, was the daughter of a clergyman who inherited the family pottery works in Staffordshire and with it a substantial country house, Hasfield Court, in Gloucestershire; William Meath Baker was her brother. The estate was a spacious one, containing a park and a lake, and a church half-hidden in the grounds. The household was one to match, consisting of no less than ten servants, including a liveried footman. No wonder Townshend was anxious to be able to ‘fix things up right’ to maintain his intended in the style to which she must have been accustomed.

Another family letter offers a glimpse of their shared interests. That November ‘Miss Baker and Uncle Dick went out for a ride to Richmond Park and just as they were starting Miss Baker’s horse sat down with her on his back and twice in the Park it bolted’. No doubt it was a case of Richard, an experienced horseman, to the rescue, as it was a few days later when he had to pull a recalcitrant donkey along during an expedition to Wimbledon Common.[12] The pair shared other interests, too, for Dorothea, like the Townshend girls, was an intellectual. After a period at Miss May’s school in Clifton,[13] she had become an enthusiastic pupil and helper of an amateur Gloucestershire geologist and antiquarian, the Reverend WS Symonds, together with her sister Mary Frances and her friend Alice Roberts of neighbouring Redmarley d’Abitot. Symonds found Dorothea worthy of contributing illustrations to his scholarly geological survey of North and South Wales, Devon and Cornwall, *Records of the Rocks,* while Alice Roberts compiled the Index.[14]

An Encounter with a Mitigated Ruffian

The new relationship changed everything for Townshend, now in his early thirties, giving him a new purpose in life. No doubt the pair planned their future. They were committed to each other but could make no formal declaration until their financial position was secure. So Richard would return to America with the clear purpose of making his pile, and return to marry and adopt a profession. After a year of comfortable home life, and as much of Dorothea’s company as propriety allowed, Townshend returned to Colorado and looked about him. He found a silver mining ‘boom’ taking place at Leadville, but wisely declined to invest directly. Instead he saw that the influx of many thousands of miners was creating a huge need for transport animals, and he heard that horses and mules that could be bought for ten dollars in Texas, might fetch ten times that in Leadville. Easier said than done, but the potential profit was enormous.

12 Gloucestershire Archives 1693.

13 Gloucestershire Archives 410.

14 John Murray, 1872.

So Townshend betook himself east to Texas, where he found himself being reminded that it was only thirteen years since the end of the Civil War. The experience led him to put his finger on another unhappy aspect of life in the United States.

> But the real novelty to me was the coloured folk. Texas had been a slave state, and I had never been in one before. There never had been slaves in the Territories such as Colorado and New Mexico, and, except perhaps for a few coloured waiters in the town hotels, you never saw people with negro blood. Here on the contrary, they were very much in evidence on the platforms in the shape of porters, hack-drivers, and so forth. It seemed as if a great deal of the manual labour down here was done by blacks; they were of all shades, from jet-black negroes to light octoroons hardly darker than whites, but it was obvious that between the two races, the White and the Coloured, there was a great gulf fixed.[15]

Townshend was careful to ascertain that his Mexican partners would be accepted, and began the slow gradual process of gathering the necessary stock at acceptable prices, and securing safe pasturage as their numbers grew to over 200. His outlay must have been enormous, for in addition to buying the horses and mules, Townshend mustered a team of eleven for the estimated four-month journey, including eight experienced Mexican herders. Many of the animals needed to be lassoed, broken and branded, and bills of sale had to be produced for the State Inspector. Townshend, always law-abiding, turned down an offer of stolen stock at suspiciously cheap rates. Other difficulties loomed. The journey from Texas to Colorado via New Mexico was one of some 1,500 miles, including a hundred-mile stretch with no water. Townshend was warned of warlike roving bands of Apaches who had broken away from their Reservation, and of an estimated 3,000 outlaws on the loose. Stampedes and consequent losses of stock were constant possibilities; the whole enterprise was fraught with risk and Townshend must have been all too painfully aware that his future life and happiness were at stake. He took such precautions as he could, arranging to camp off-trail at night without fires, and setting watches. In the event the party would remain safe from attack, but failed to prevent a major stampede of half the herd, some of them running loose for 90 miles. Rounding them up caused a month's delay.

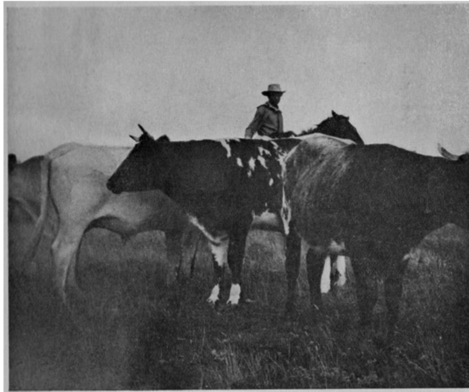
Well-meant predictions of disaster continued along the way. Townshend encountered a troop of US Cavalry 'whose warnings of the dangers that lay before me grew more and more emphatic the less I seemed to heed them' he wrote. Once again Townshend's sheer likeability stood him in good stead. One man 'who had happened to take a liking for me' took him aside and told him to make sure to keep on the right side of a certain Beckford, a small-time gang boss who was renowned for having shot his son-in-law for disobedience. Townshend did indeed encounter the man, and came to have a real regard for him despite his lawlessness. Beckford was fascinated by talk of life in England, and was not without his own pretensions to the civilised life. He told how he had bought a piano for his daughter, claiming it was New Mexico's first. And by way of further warning, he related how another young Englishman had come out with an extensive library of books, only to be shot by a gang of rustlers. In the defence of literary culture, Beckford caught up with them and 'eliminated' the lot.

That meeting with a friendly criminal would prove vital to the success of Townshend's enterprise, for Beckford's parting gift was a hastily scrawled pencil note of introduction 'for one special man you want to watch out for'. That man was Henry McCarty, alias William Bonney, alias Billy the Kid, known throughout Arizona and New Mexico for various robberies and cold-blooded murders. The year before, he had joined a group of cattle rustlers.

15 RB Townshend, *The Tenderfoot in New Mexico* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1923), 171-172.

Camped for the noon meal on 26th June 1879 – he would remember the date – Townshend was advised by a terrified herder that 'the robbers have come' - four heavily armed men were approaching on horseback. Townshend thought best to try diplomacy and invited them to have some dinner. It was a tense meal, the men eating with their weapons on their laps, sitting facing one another so that they could see behind each other's backs. Conversation was monosyllabic and the atmosphere threatening. Afterwards one of the gang, 'a wolf-faced giant' suggested an inspection of the herd, and the four escorted Townshend, one each side, and two behind him. On the way the smallest of the four, a slightly-built clean-shaven young man with a restless eye 'like that of an untamed wild animal in a cage' asked many pointed questions about the horses, their provenance and value. Townshend thought best to answer honestly and politely, but took opportunity to drop in a reference to his encounter with the Cavalry troop. The young man, gradually emerging as the leader of the group, began a mock negotiation for the herd, asking what price Townshend would take per head; 'he was like a cat over a mouse, and obviously enjoyed it'. The other men began to lose patience, one of them muttering, 'time for ye to quit yer fooling, Kid'. Townshend, now realising that he was dealing with the notorious murderer himself, lost no time in relating his friendship with Beckford and producing his pencilled note. The Kid, evidently no scholar,

Henry McCarty, alias 'Billy the Kid'



RBT 'rounding up'
(from *The Tenderfoot in Colorado*)

had to summon a colleague to help him decipher it, but once understood, the message from the mutual acquaintance proved sufficient to ensure Townshend, his men, and the herd were not to be interfered with. Affably, the Kid said how well it was for all parties that there had been no misunderstanding over his offer to take the herd on credit. 'Billy was a humorist, and his smooth, mobile face and foxy eyes showed how he relished the sarcasm in this' Townshend wrote. But the episode concluded with Billy wishing him luck, good prices for his stock at Leadville, and the use of his name in the event of any future interference. Townshend later wrote 'I was never so glad to see anything in my life as the cartridge-girdled backs of those four ruffians riding off'. Not only had the Kid spared Townshend the loss of his herd, to say nothing of his life, but he had virtually guaranteed a safe passage and thus the success of the whole enterprise. No doubt Townshend dined out on this story, and many others, for the rest of his life, and, understandably retained a soft spot for Billy. On hearing of his death two years later, he admitted to one half sigh of regret, 'for Billy to me had been a mitigated ruffian'. Even so, and despite all the accumulated romantic 'Billy the Kid' legend, Townshend must have known that he had looked into the eyes of a psychopath whose fingers had never strayed far from his gun that afternoon.

His long and hazardous journey once safely accomplished, Townshend based himself at Colorado Springs, acquired a train of wagons and 'teamed' to Leadville to accustom the animals to harness and begin to sell the stock. It proved a gradual process but ultimately a successful one, and as soon as he could Townshend, the Tenderfoot no longer, turned the business of selling the remainder of the herd over to a friend and set sail for England, home, and Dorothea. But in one sense he never left and his American experiences stayed with him for the rest of his life. He returned several times, took photographs and made slides for 'magic lantern' talks and wrote articles and books about his adventures. Like August Jaeger, he was garrulous by nature and became a tireless raconteur of his experiences – too much of a good thing, perhaps, at times, for some. 'Look at here' might be his way of beginning an anecdote, with 'You hear me talk!' marking its conclusion. Dora Penny remembered,

> He had a curious didactic way of speaking . . . and he had a trick of finishing up a rather tall-sounding story with an impressive 'I'm telling *you*' to convince you of the truth of it. Retailing more lurid stories of his life in New Mexico to men friends, I have been told that R.B.T.'s blue eyes blazed with exasperation and excitement when the audience did not seem sufficiently impressed. 'Damn and blast it, man! Can't you understand what I'm telling you?'[16]

And no doubt Townshend's talk, like his writings, was given added spice and savour through its mix of words and phrases acquired during his travels, such as 'look at here', 'tonified', 'spondulics', 'plumb crazy', 'at oncet' and 'a little John man'. It was a vocabulary which must have struck and delighted Elgar, for he too was a lover of unconventional word-play, but it would form only one aspect of the rapport which would develop between the composer and a man so much of whose life had been lived in a world refreshingly far from the stiff collars and teacups of Malvern.

(To be continued)

Kevin Allen is a founding member and former Secretary of the Southern Branch of the Elgar Society. His publications include August Jaeger: Portrait of Nimrod, Hugh Blair: Worcester's Forgotten Organist, Elgar in Love: Vera Hockman and the Third Symphony, *and* Gracious Ladies: Edward Elgar and the Norbury Family. *He has a long-standing interest in the 'Enigma' characters and their rich documentary legacies.*

16 Dora Powell, *Edward Elgar: Memories of a Variation* 4th Edition (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 125.

BB and EE: From loathing to respect: Britten and the music of Elgar

Andrew Neill

On 2 October 1930 the sixteen year-old Edward Benjamin Britten wrote in his diary: 'Go to Queen's Hall & prom. Elgar 2nd Symphony, (dreadful, nobilmente sempre) – I come out after 3rd movement – so bored. He (Elgar) conducts – ovation beforehand!!!!!!!!!!'.[1] In this way Britten records his vividly negative experience of hearing Elgar's E flat Symphony, during which he also had the privilege of hearing and seeing the composer conduct; an experience that seems to have left no impression on an impressionable young mind. This article demonstrates how the strongly-held feelings of youth can change and how one great artist can develop and begin to show a grudging respect for the work of another whose art he once despised. The subject is Britten and Elgar but is also about a 'what if': Britten's non-conducting of Elgar's 'For the Fallen', not through any change of mind or prejudice but because of the burning of The Maltings in Snape. His intention to perform this, then a rarely performed work, shows that Britten's journey was a remarkable one.

On 23 February 1934 the BBC broadcast the first performance of *A Boy Was Born* by the twenty-year-old Britten.[2] *A Boy Was Born* consists of fifteenth and sixteenth century poems set in the 'form of a theme and six variations' the exception being the setting of Christina Rossetti's 'In the Bleak Midwinter' [in which] Britten 'reveals himself as a true genius instead of (merely!) a remarkable talent'.[3] Of all the great composers born in the twentieth century, few matched Britten's natural ability, which was akin to that of Mozart or Korngold in its early brilliance and promise.[4] The contrast with Elgar's self-taught progression as a composer could not be greater and this broadcast, on the day of Elgar's death, was a coincidence of more than passing significance. In 1963 the musicologist Hans Keller, who admired Elgar, said of Britten 'I personally would not hesitate to call Britten the greatest composer alive'.[5] In comparison it is likely only a few critics would have said the same of Elgar during his lifetime, although Hans Richter's tribute before the first London rehearsal of Elgar's A Flat Symphony on 6 December 1908 - 'Gentlemen, let us now rehearse the greatest symphony of modern times, written by the greatest modern composer, and not only in this country' - is the most generous of tributes. However, that to Britten, from an

1 Ed. John Evans, *Diaries of the young Benjamin Britten 1928-1938* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009). The concert included two songs by Vaughan Williams and Ireland's piano concerto (which Britten liked).

2 Britten was born on 22 November 1913

3 David Matthews, *Britten* (London: Haus Publishing Ltd, 2013), 29.

4 No doubt Britten would have loathed being mentioned in the same sentence as Korngold.

5 John Bridcut, *Britten* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 18.

Benjamin Britten

Austrian émigré, really is exceptional particularly as Keller's views were expressed at a time when Shostakovich and Stravinsky were still very much alive.

In his 1932 diary Britten recorded hearing Elgar's music twice; once in April when he says: 'Elgar I didn't like' but before Christmas he noted: 'Listen to wireless inc. Elgar's Falstaff which contains some v. fine stuff – also some . . . !!!'.[6] Like Elgar, Britten was not an 'easy' character but created a circle of devoted friends who protected him and, as W H Auden wrote, 'you will always be surrounded by people who adore you, nurse you and praise everything you do'.[7] This can be unhealthy and a partial consequence of this adulation was the legion of 'Britten's corpses' including Eric Crozier, Sir Charles Mackerras, Robert Tear and Sophie Wyss. It might be said that Sir Adrian Boult became an Elgar 'corpse', albeit a temporary one. However, at least Elgar had the grace to patch up their relationship after what he perceived was a slight to his music. Britten's contempt for the music of other composers is also well-known. He described Victor Hely-

6 Ed. Evans, Diary 11.12.32.

7 Henry Boys (1910-1992), the dedicatee of the composer's Violin Concerto from 1939 and first cousin of the author's mother, remained a devoted friend of the composer until his death in 1976. Boys worked with Robert Duncan on the vocal score of *The Rape of Lucretia* and as Britten's *répétiteur* at Glyndebourne.

Hutchinson's *Carol Symphony* as 'utter bilge'[8] but his (in my view) ridiculous attitude to the music of Brahms, whom he once revered, does him no credit. Although many who worked with Britten recall his sense of humour, he failed to see beyond Vaughan Williams's ironic observation on his own Fourth Symphony. Having been impressed by the symphony, Britten was horrified by the composer's comment 'If that's modern music, all I can say is I don't like it'. He had already made up his mind about most of the older composer's music describing Vaughan Williams's *Benedicite* as 'music that repulses me as does most of Brahms (solid and dull)'.[9]

In their biographies of Britten, John Bridcut and Michael Kennedy draw on a number of parallels between Britten and Elgar all of which seem plausible: they were both ignored before being taken up by the establishment and their music praised (even over-praised) by non-British musicians and musicologists. Both could be very sensitive about any implied criticism of their music and were happiest when at home in the countryside of their birth. They were outsiders, too: Elgar because of his class and religion and Britten because of his homosexuality. John Bridcut shows how Britten mellowed towards the music of Elgar at the end of his life and, clearly encouraged by Peter Pears to consider *The Dream of Gerontius*, looked at the music through the eyes and ears of experience.[10] However, there were clear divergences:

> Michael Tippett in his inspired broadcast tribute on the day of Britten's death, said: that the triumph of *Peter Grimes* meant for Britten that 'he was now willing in himself, and, indeed, determined to be, within the twentieth century, a professional opera composer. That in itself is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do; and one of the achievements for which he will always be remembered in musical history books is that, in fact, he actually *did* it'.[11]

So when using the word 'divergence' this is more of style than of determination for Elgar, more or less, managed to become a self-supporting composer on his own terms too. Furthermore, Britten the opera composer had set himself on a very different course to Elgar, who worked towards the composition of a symphony for most of the preceding thirty years.

On 2 June 1967 (110 years after Elgar's birth) The Queen opened the Maltings Concert Hall in Snape. At 3.15 pm the inaugural concert began with Britten's brilliant arrangement of The National Anthem, followed by his Overture *The Building of the House*, Delius's *Summer Night on the River*, Holst's *St Paul's Suite* and concluded with Handel's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*. The following year (on 18-19 December) in the by now renowned acoustic of the Maltings, Britten made his celebrated recording for Decca with the English Chamber Orchestra: 'Britten conducts English Music for Strings'. A view of the Maltings adorned the cover of the sleeve and the performance of the *Introduction & Allegro* remains one of the finest recorded.[12]

Britten's early comments on the music of Elgar show the length of the journey he travelled to consider performing and recording his predecessor's music. In his early twenties Britten developed

8 Donald Mitchell, ed. *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 133.

9 Matthews, 29 (from an unpublished letter).

10 In a conversation with John Bridcut on 2 September 2021 we agreed on how alike, in certain areas, Britten and Elgar were.

11 Michael Kennedy, *Britten* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd 1981), 117.

12 The disc (SXL 6405) also included Frank Bridge's *Sir Roger de Coverley,* Britten's *Simple Symphony,* Delius's *Two Aquarelles* and the Purcell *Chacony*.

increasingly left-wing views and, after attending a Prom in 1935, 'he commented on Elgar's First Symphony: "I swear that only in Imperialistic England could such a work be tolerated"'.[13] In 1931 he had listened briefly to a broadcast of Elgar, '1 min of Elgar Symphony 2 but can stand no more'. Earlier he had written to his parents after attending a Promenade Concert: 'The concert was very nice (Prom at QH). We came out at half time, and I wasn't very sorry because the seats were very hard . . . the second part was all Elgar'.[14]

On 6 May 1931 Britten heard the BBC Symphony Orchestra perform under the direction of Sir Adrian Boult in the Queen's Hall. Readers may not agree with the young Britten's criticisms but they show not only his ability but also lay bare his prejudices: '

> Euryanthe ov. beastly bit of music, mauled about by Boult (2nd subject more than 2ce as slow as 1st sub.). Bad slips on part of orch. V. Williams Tallis Fantasia, V. beautiful (wonderfully scored), but over long. well played. Cortot in Saint-Saëns 4th Con, very wonderfully playing in spite of many wrong notes, which one didn't mind. Encored, playing (marvellously heavenlily [sic]) a Chopin Waltz (C# min). Mahler's Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen (Maria Olszewska, wonderful singing). Lovely little pieces, exquisitely scored - a lesson to all the Elgars & Strausses in the world. Enigma Variations, a terrible contrast to these little wonders. I listened with an open mind but cannot say that I was less annoyed by them, than usual. Of course there must be alot [sic] in them, but that type of sonorous orchestration (especially in Var. V, IX, XII, (which seem exactly alike to me) cloys very soon. Of course there are lovely moments (Dorabella is good, but is spoilt by trite ending =Var. XIII is very effective=. On the whole I think Ysobel's the best) but Oh! No X1V!! The orchestra played their exacting, but effective parts very well & Adrian Boult was a sympathetic conductor, I suppose. I suppose it is my fault, and there is something lacking in me, that I am absolutely incapable of enjoying Elgar, for more than 2 minutes.[15]

As Michael Kennedy and others have pointed out, Britten was ahead of his time in appreciating Mahler's music and had already purchased a score of the Mahler song-cycle. In November 1931 he again attended another BBC concert when Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* was performed: 'nice spots but terrible –"Toselli's Seranata"'. The concert was one more conducted by Boult whom Britten judged to be a 'terrible execrable conductor'.[16] It should be noted that Frank Bridge, Britten's teacher, also wanted the job as the first conductor of the newly formed BBC Symphony Orchestra.[17] Britten did not ignore Elgar's music; he just did not like it and to be fair he tried: 'After dinner I listened to prom on radio. Delius's marvellously beautiful tho' meandering and too long Song of the High Hills, completely dwarfs the rest of the anaemic programme . . . Elgar's typical Sea Pictures . . .'.[18] 'Listened to Elgar concert after dinner. The Intro and All. makes some nice sounds, but the form seems so unsatisfactory . . . so does most of the Enigma Var. and all of the Second Sym'.[19]

13 Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 68-69.

14 Ed. Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed, *Letters from a Life, selected letters and diaries of Benjamin Britten 1923-39* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991). Letter 24.9.30.

15 Ed. Mitchell and Reed, Diary 6.5.31.

16 Ed. Mitchell and Reed, Diary 4.11.31.

17 Michael Kennedy *Trading Insults* (The Spectator, 8 January 2013).

18 Ed. Mitchell and Reed, Diary 20.9.32.

19 Ed. Mitchell and Reed, Diary 7.12.32.

In the summer of 1934 Britten noted: 'Listen to Toni Brosa and [Ivan] Phillipowsky give a rather stiff perf. of Elgar's violin Sonata . . . how I wish I could like this music. Of course, it is beautifully done but says nothing that Franck & Brahms haven't said before – not that I even want the latter'.[20] Elgar and Brahms coincided on the programme when Britten attended one of Toscanini's renowned concerts with the BBC Symphony Orchestra: 'To Queen's Hall for BBC Orch under Toscanini. Rather unfortunate programme, as two works are anathema to me – Brahms 4th and Enigma Var. of Elgar'.[21] By 1937 Britten was beginning to assess where he stood in British musical life, describing Walton as 'the head-prefect of English Music … Vaughan Williams being of course the Headmaster. Elgar was never *that* – but a member of the Governing Board'.[22] In August 1937 Britten arrived as an international composer when the Boyd Neel Orchestra performed the premiere, in Salzburg, of his *Frank Bridge Variations*. The review in the *Salzburger Volksblatt*[23] began: '*English Music* played by a quite dazzling English string orchestra'. The review thanked the Austrian Ambassador in London for suggesting the concert which 'began with a Chaconne by Purcell and then played two Aquarelles by Delius and a concert piece by Elgar [the Introduction and Allegro] and a quite splendid series of Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge of Benjamin Britten'.

Michael Kennedy, once wrote of Britten as a great 'hater'[24] and, of course, Elgar had his dislikes too, but these were hardly as strong as 'hating', with the possible exception of the emotion he directed at Stanford. Before he was 30 years old Britten had commented on the score of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, 'I am impatient to see how the old magician makes his effects! There's a hell of a lot I can learn from him!'[25] However, in 1971 he referred to *Der Rosenkavalier* as 'that loathsome opera, which makes me almost physically sick to hear it'.[26] For a listener who revels in the glory and subtlety of Strauss's orchestration this is almost incomprehensible. We all change as we age, and Britten and Elgar were no exceptions. In 1962 Britten confided in Peter Pears, referring to a proposed programme of British Music and Art in Leningrad and Moscow: 'It is a curse about Russia and those concerts . . . they could have been fun – but now it all seems so mediocre & pointless. What a first concert – Elgar (well, not so bad, I suppose), Fricker, Bliss and VW. I'm jolly well going to get hold of those programmes and see if I can't think of something a bit brighter'.[27] In 1967 he wrote to Sir William Glock (then Controller of Music at the BBC) concerning a proposed visit of the BBC Symphony Orchestra to the Aldeburgh Festival: 'Colin D(avis) will be taking charge of the orchestra that week & one would like to think of a programme of works which he likes and which we normally wouldn't do ourselves here: something like Elgar (In the South, I like particularly)'.[28]

20 Ed. Mitchell and Reed, Diary 11.6.34.

21 Ed. Mitchell and Reed, Diary 31.5.35.

22 Carpenter, 110.

23 Edition of 28.8.37.

24 Kennedy, *The Spectator*.

25 Bridcut, 39.

26 Kennedy, *The Spectator*.

27 Ed. Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke, *Letters from a life, The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976 Vol.5* (London: Faber & Faber 2010), Letter 20.10.62.

28 Ed. Reed and Cooke, Letter 20.6.67.

We can now see how Peter Pears began to influence Britten in his attitude to Elgar's music. In March 1968 Pears was in Canterbury for the filming, by the BBC, of the now renowned performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*. Britten wrote to him: 'This is to bring my love to Canterbury, and to wish you lots of good things for your Gerontius – I'll be thinking of you and that ought to help, plus Adrian's conducting! . . . remember to keep your eyes closed reverently!'[29] In May 1969 Pears sang Gerontius in Norwich prompting Britten to write to Myfanwy Piper: 'Peter did an absolute knockout Gerontius on Saturday in Norwich'.[30] A day later he wrote to the conductor of the performance, Philip Ledger: 'I wanted to tell you how impressed I was by your Gerontius. I think you did a most efficient and musical job, and to move one, as you did me, under those circumstances, was amazing'.[31]

It is clear that Britten was happy to conduct at least three Elgar compositions and, had he lived longer, this may have expanded in number. The success of his recording of music for strings had clearly inspired Britten. It is believed that he even suggested making another disc which would have included Delius's *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* and the Vaughan Williams *Tallis Fantasia.* Furthermore, his youthful criticisms of Elgar's orchestration seemed to have been forgotten and, bearing in mind Britten's exceptional ability as an orchestrator, it is difficult to imagine he did not come to admire Elgar's orchestrating skills too. Had Elgar lived to study the scores of the *Frank Bridge Variations* and *The Young Persons Guide* it is easy to imagine him lost in equal admiration.

Britten and Elgar were passionate creative artists who, like others of their kind, lived self-centred existences with others running around attending to many of their wishes and needs. Alice Elgar devoted her life to her husband's work subsuming any creative desires she may have fostered, with their daughter Carice coming a good third place in their lives. Both composers could be prickly and easily offend others and could, in turn, take offence easily. Their respective journey to greatness could not be more different and few of their compositions have much in common, but they set alight British music in the first two decades of the twentieth century and for the years after World War Two. It might be argued that between them they composed the two most important British works of the century. Elgar's A Flat Symphony demonstrated that, at last, the country had a composer who could produce a great symphony and, likewise, *Peter Grimes* did the same for opera.

Britten conducts Elgar

At The Britten Pears Arts Archive in Aldeburgh I examined the scores relating to Elgar's music that are archived there. Perhaps most surprising was a vocal score of *The Dream of Gerontius*. On the inside title page is inscribed the signature *E B Britten* with the date 1925. It is not known whether this was a gift or a purchase, but it is clear that Britten was familiar with Elgar's music at the age of eleven or twelve. The score is annotated in pencil by Britten but was also used by Sir Peter Pears, for the tenor part is heavily marked in his hand in coloured ink. Britten's full score of *The Dream of Gerontius* is marked up by Britten in pencil (as conductor) and reflects the seriousness with which

29 Ed. Reed and Cooke, Post Card 26-29.3.68. The performance, made by the BBC, is available on DVD (ICAD 5140). Dame Janet Baker and John Shirley-Quirk were the other soloists, and the London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra were conducted by Sir Adrian Boult.

30 Ed. Reed and Cooke, Letter 14.5.69.

31 Ed. Reed and Cooke, Letter 15.5.69. (Quoted as a footnote).

he took the performance and recording. There is no conductor's score of *The Spirit of England,* only a vocal score of 'For the Fallen'. There are no markings of significance by Britten, and the cover has the initials BB on the top right-hand corner. It is possible that Britten might have used this score for his intended performance but, bearing in mind his fastidiousness, this seems unlikely. Before his death, Britten had bought a set of recordings of Elgar conducting his own music: *Images of Elgar* issued by EMI in 1972.[32]

Sir Peter Pears owned a vocal score of 'To Women' suggesting he might have considered singing this at one stage. It is possible that a performance of a complete *Spirit of England* might have been considered by Britten too. Pears also owned a green hard-bound vocal score of *The Dream of Gerontius* in which there are some markings by him; largely towards the end. [To annotate Britten's scores in depth requires someone better qualified than I to do this. It could be a project for a student particularly if he or she extended their work to cover Britten's scores of other composers, the music of which he conducted, performed and recorded.]

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In 1931 Britten 'said the *Introduction and Allegro* had 'nice spots' but was 'terrible' and, after seeing Toscanini conduct it, he said 'not for me'. But a few days later he bought the score, just at the time he was starting his own orchestral piece for strings, *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*. Perhaps he wanted to learn how another 'old magician' made his effects and maybe he had come round to them when, by 1969 he wrote of the novelty of Elgar's 'subtle sonorities, contrasting and combining the quartet and orchestra'.[33] Even though Britten in his youth, declared that he was 'absolutely incapable of enjoying Elgar for more than two minutes' he had 'come a long way' by the time he conducted *The Dream of Gerontius* for the first time in June 1971 for the Aldeburgh Festival and, in one or two instances, allegedly decided to 'improve' Elgar's orchestration.[34] Although one distinguished conductor with whom I discussed the recording recently had few words of praise for it, nevertheless it is generally considered that Britten produced one of the more 'interesting' and perceptive recordings of the work of which there are now in excess of twenty commercial issues. Edward Greenfield, in his review for *The Guardian* felt that, despite his preference for Dame Janet Baker in the Barbirolli recording, he recommended the new issue because of its better sound, the other soloists and Britten's conducting. The recording took place in the Maltings on 19-24 July 1971. The soloists were Peter Pears, Yvonne Minton and John Shirley-Quirk with the Choir of King's College Chapel, Cambridge and the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. Arthur Oldham (1926-2003) as chorus master of the LSO Chorus worked on the recording. He had been one of Britten's few private pupils and in his autobiography wrote of a visit to The Red House to discuss the preparations for the recording:

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32 The set included a copy of Jerrold Northrop Moore's *Elgar: A Life in photographs*.

33 Bridcut, 118.

34 When I examined Britten's score, I could detect no obvious alterations to Elgar's orchestration in the time available. A more detailed study may reveal some minor changes. One passage that has often puzzled listeners is Britten's phrasing of the semi-chorus passage (Cue 64) beginning 'Noe from the waters in a saving home'. Britten had entered no markings to suggest why this should be phrased in a different way to any other performance. One of the glories of the Britten recording is his use of the Choir of King's College Cambridge as the semi-chorus.

Britten's marked full score of *The Dream of Gerontius* at cue 26 (Britten Pears Arts Archive)

The Red House, Aldeburgh (Andrew Neill)

> I asked (Britten) why he had chosen to record this particular work since, when I had been working with him as his pupil (in the 1940s), he had expressed considerable distaste for Elgar's music. 'Well you know', he told me 'I've been looking at the score again, and if you strip off all the encrustations which have accumulated over the years' – (he was no doubt referring to the `Barbirolli 'tradition' which had become the norm for performances of Gerontius) – 'there is really a very good piece underneath'.[35]

Britten wrote to Donald and Kathleen Mitchell saying: 'Think of me ploughing through Gerontius next week . . .'[36] and later sent copies of the recording to both Clifford Curzon and Sir William Walton – the latter replying: 'It has almost overcome my antipathy to it. At any rate my protestant hackles didn't quite rise as they usually do when I listen to this work'.[37] Michael Kennedy wrote of the recording:

> Those present at the sessions recall that Britten was 'far fussier about Gerontius than he ever was about one of his own works' and made nine 'takes' of the prelude to Part 1 (which he referred to as "Act 1') before he was satisfied. Certain remarks of his at the rehearsals have been preserved. Thus, in the Demon's chorus: 'Make it sulky' and 'laugh as if it were the oldest joke you've ever heard'; in the stretto on the chorus 'Praise to the Holiest': 'if you feel in your bones that you can't stop it getting faster, you know we're making the accelerando just right'; at 'Novissima hora est': 'make it sound like a long forgotten lullaby'; to the cellos during 'sanctus fortis': 'Don't dig into the strings; glide over it, it'll be too heavy otherwise'.[38]

35 Arthur Oldham, *Living with Voices* (London: Thames Publishing, 2000), 30.

36 Ed. Reed and Cooke, Letter 18.7.71.

37 Ed. Reed and Cooke, Letter 7.8.72. (Quoted as a footnote).

The most substantial work by another British composer Britten recorded was *The Dream of Gerontius*. The role of Peter Pears in this achievement clearly cannot be under-estimated. It was surely Pears, too, who was behind the 1945 recording of *On Wenlock Edge* with Britten and the Zorian Quartet and when Vaughan Williams died in 1958 Britten was generous in his tribute sent to Ursula Vaughan Williams: 'a tremendous figure to me'.[39]

This was the same man who, as a youth, could not bear listening to Elgar's music but now he had admitted to 'liking' *In the South* and was taking the recording of *Gerontius* very seriously and enjoying himself. Given another twenty years of life who knows where Britten's great musical intelligence would have taken him. His note on 'For the Fallen' shows he understood what Elgar was trying to say, but it is idle to attempt to interpret further and, of course, speculation can be sterile.

Printed below are Britten's programme notes (as written) for the performance scheduled for The Maltings on Sunday 15 June 1969. Fate, or rather fire, intervened and The Maltings was destroyed a week earlier on 8 June. Fate also intervened when Britten died – too young - aged 63 on 4 December 1976.

***Introduction and Allegro for Strings** Op 47*
for quartet and orchestra
First performed in the Queen's Hall, London, on 8th March 1905, this work was dedicated to Professor S. S. Sanford, of Yale, at which University Elgar was made an Honorary Doctor of Music in June of that year. The Introduction is fragmentary, with much foreshadowing of the thematic material of the Allegro−the 'nobilmente' second theme, the ambling first theme with its rising fifths and sixths, but principally the haunting melody of the work¬supposedly a folk-melody, which Elgar heard sung in the Welsh mountains, characterised by a repeated falling third. There had been many great works for strings before this: one thinks of Purcell's Chacony, the third Brandenburg, Handel, Mozart, Tchaikovsky and Grieg, but all these subtle sonorities, contrasting and combining the quartet and orchestra, and, above all, the brilliant Kreutzer-like scales and arpeggios, were something new.

For the Fallen (The Spirit of England No. 3)
for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra
It is not surprising that the war of 1914-18 produced from the red-hot patriot Elgar many immediately inspiring works: Carillon, Polonia, Le Drapeau Belge, and the Spirit of England (The Fourth of August, To Women, For the Fallen). In the rather different atmosphere of today some of these works have lost their immediacy, but For the Fallen has always seemed to me to have in its opening bars a personal tenderness and grief, in the grotesque march an agony of distortion, and in the final sequences a ring of genuine splendour. It was first performed in Leeds on 3rd May 1916, and in London the following week at a series of concerts in aid of the Red Cross, during which week The Dream of Gerontius was performed daily.

B.B.

38 Kennedy, 102.

39 Kennedy, 122.

Coda

With the destruction of the Maltings the concert took place in the faithful Blythburgh Church. Britten conducted the *Introduction and Allegro for Strings* but, sadly, 'For the Fallen' was dropped in favour of Holst's *Fugal Concerto* with Richard Adeney, flute and Peter Graeme, oboe. The English Chamber Orchestra was conducted by Imogen Holst. After the interval Haydn's Mass in B flat *Harmoniemesse* was performed with Heather Harper, soprano (who would have sung the solo in 'For the Fallen'), Janet Baker, mezzo-soprano, Kenneth Bowen, tenor and Anthony Williams, bass. The Mass was conducted by Philip Ledger. 'For the Fallen' remains one of the few masterpieces to be composed about war during wartime, something I believe Britten understood. There is no correspondence in the Britten Pears Arts Archive explaining the change of work: it may be possible to detect the influence of Imogen Holst but this would only be conjecture! The concert was scheduled for broadcast by the BBC and may have been one of the first broadcasts of 'For the Fallen' since the end of World War Two. For those who had never heard the work its cancellation was very disappointing and, unfortunately its replacement by Holst's enjoyable but slight concerto seemed then and still seems a poor substitute.

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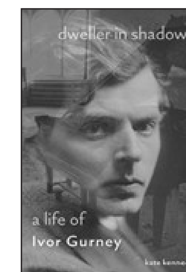
I am grateful to Dr Nicholas Clark the Librarian and Judith Ratcliffe, Archivist of Britten Pears Arts, for making available Britten's scores when I visited The Red House and its Archive in October 2021. Dr. Clark was also most helpful with some later comments. Andrew Dalton also provided assistance and advice. I thank him as well as Britten's biographer, John Bridcut, for his wider advice.

BOOK REVIEWS

Dweller in Shadows: a Life of Ivor Gurney
Kate Kennedy



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Like Elgar, Ivor Gurney was brought up in a Three Choirs city, and his parents occupied more or less the same stratum of Victorian society as Elgar's, David Gurney being a self-employed tailor whose business premises included accommodation for his family. Like Elgar, Gurney gained valuable early experience by taking part in music-making at a local church (in his case, an Anglican rather than a Roman Catholic one). But there the similarities end, for with effect from 1900 Gurney's 'local church' was the Cathedral of St Peter and The Holy and Indivisible Trinity, Gloucester, where he was a chorister under Herbert Brewer and a pupil at King's School. Like Walton at Christ Church, Oxford some twelve years later, he was now a member of an underrated and perhaps unacknowledged category of professional musician, the cathedral treble. In his biography of Gurney, Michael Hurd was dismissive of Brewer and suggested that the diet to which he subjected his choristers was a little dull;[1] but more important than what exactly Gurney was required to sing was that he was performing in public, as well as rehearsing, on an almost daily basis and engaging with printed music in the same way as the adult members of the choir. It was, and remains, an excellent introduction to a life of professional music-making, and there was the additional benefit of involvement in the Three Choirs Festival. Important also was the sonorous prose of the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, and if we seek the origins of Gurney's facility with words, and in particular his wartime irruption as a poet, perhaps we will find some of them in the spoken parts of the services, and in the rhymes and metrical schemes he encountered in *Hymns Ancient & Modern*. In 1906 he ascended from the choir-stalls to the organ-loft, where with Herbert Howells and Ivor Novello he became a member of a trio of articled pupils learning their craft on Gloucester's relatively modest Father Willis organ. His general progress was such that in 1911 he won an open scholarship to the Royal College of Music, where he studied composition with Stanford and the organ with Walter Alcock. Admission to the Gloucester organ-loft had been, in effect, admission to the musical establishment, of which the organists of the Anglican church were a large part; and study in South Kensington, the home both of the RCM and the Royal College of Organists, consolidated Gurney's membership, as did his acquisition of the ARCO diploma, which was, and remains, an important milestone in an organist's career. He passed the RCO exam in January 1914 and later in the same year was able to report to Will Harvey the completion of

1 Hurd, Michael, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 13-14.

his *Five Elizabethan Songs*, which include the harrowingly beautiful *Sleep*, a masterpiece occupying a lonely eminence in English song. It is difficult to say what sort of career Gurney would have had, if his studies at the RCM had been completed and war and mental illness had not intervened. Had he opted for the world of professional music-making, he would have had the benefit of much that the self-taught Elgar entirely lacked, such as formal qualifications, the contacts made whilst undertaking high-level study, and the ability to call for references from prominent figures like Brewer and Stanford; but he was as fluent with words as he was with notes. Highly literate and highly articulate, he would almost certainly have had difficulty settling for anything that denied his extra-musical gifts full rein, and we know enough about the pre-RCM Gurney to be doubtful as to whether he would ever have settled comfortably into the routines of a conventional professional life. In any event, he volunteered for active service, for which he was accepted in 1915; but his war in effect ended in 1917, in which year - having been wounded (April) and later gassed (September) - he left France in order to recuperate near Edinburgh. In October 1918 he was discharged from military service, having earlier in the year shown signs of mental imbalance; but in 1919 he was well enough, both mentally and physically, to return to the RCM, and he did so not only as a musician and soldier but also as a published poet, for in 1917 Sidgwick & Jackson had brought out *Severn and Somme*, a slim volume comprising poems written whilst on service in France. The publication of a second edition, and the issue of a further volume, *War's Embers*, coincided with the resumption of Gurney's studies, and with Vaughan Williams rather than Stanford teaching him composition, for a few years Gurney flourished musically as well, the older composer having himself served in the war and, partly perhaps for that reason, being a more sympathetic mentor than Stanford. Stainer & Bell, Oxford University Press and Winthrop Rogers published some of the songs, and singers such as John Coates expressed enthusiasm for them. But by 1922 the mental decline first evidenced by his behaviour in 1918 led to Gurney's incarceration, and after a brief period in a Gloucester institution he was sent to the City of London Mental Hospital at Dartford, where he remained for the rest of his life. He continued to compose until about 1927; he continued to write poetry; and a certain amount of his music was published during these years, e.g., *Lights Out*, which appeared in 1926. He died at Dartford in 1937. The further efforts of Marion Scott and Gerald Finzi brought about posthumous publications; recognition of the stature of both the poetry and the music has steadily increased over the years, as have publications; and today we have the Ivor Gurney Society and all its splendid efforts.

Even from a cursory examination, it is clear that Dr Kennedy's book is a richly detailed work based on very intensive research, and one assumes that the publishers were entirely responsible for the dust jacket, the back panel of which (headed 'Advance Praise') is devoted to what are surely rather redundant (and somewhat effusive) encomia from the Poet Laureate and figures prominent in the academic world. If this raises questions to do with decorum, Simon Armitage's claim that this is 'the first comprehensive account [of Gurney]' raises other questions, for it seems a somewhat harsh verdict on the Hurd biography, which - with P.J. Kavanagh's edition of the poetry,[2] the Trethowan article in *Music & Letters*,[3] the relevant chapter of Professor Banfield's magisterial *Sensibility and English Song*,[4] and Kelsey Thornton's edition of the letters[5] - seemed to offer all that one could reasonably want. Moreover, Hurd wrote with the benefit of having had direct contact with members of Gurney's family and with others who could testify from first-hand experience. But it would be undignified to put both biographies in the ring and cause them to slug it out. Let it suffice to say that this new volume is certainly the longer (488 pages - of smallish print - as against Hurd's 230) and that Dr Kennedy's description of its predecessor as 'moving', and her many references to it, should be taken as encouragement, if any were needed, to retain one's copy. Of those 488 pages, just over 100 comprise impressively detailed appendices. Gurney's experiences in France, his immediate post-war activities, and the asylum years are each covered in about 100 pages, but the crucial years from his birth to his training for war service are covered in only about 60, and one may feel that a more thorough treatment was called for here. Throughout, though, Dr Kennedy writes unobtrusively elegant, readable English free with the occasional exception ('track record', 'testament to') from cliché and questionable usage. A general criticism is that the reader must sometimes wrestle with the difficulty of distinguishing between fact and speculation. Dr Kennedy seems to know exactly what Gurney was thinking at any given time. She is confident, for example, that on the day in 1919 on which he re-entered the RCM, his emotions were 'mixed'. Is this based on something Gurney wrote at the time, such as a letter to Marion Scott or Will Harvey, or is it supposition? In the absence of any end-note, one must regretfully assume the latter. One effect of this approach is to give many parts of the narrative a novel-like flavour which accords rather curiously with the scholarly character imparted by the appendices. There can be little doubt that Dr Kennedy's apparent speculation is based on intimate acquaintance with the material, but imaginative embellishments can sometimes backfire. To take an obvious instance, it is most unlikely that the first performance of the *Tallis Fantasia*, which Gurney and Howells attended, was followed by applause. The practice of applauding at the Three Choirs Festivals did not begin until the 1960s and in 1910 it would almost certainly have caused grave offence; and it is unlikely also that they left the cathedral straight after hearing the Vaughan

2 Kavanagh, P.J., ed., *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

3 Trethowan, W.H., 'Ivor Gurney's mental illness', *Music & Letters*, Vol. 62, Nos. 3-4, 300-309.

4 Banfield, Stephen, *Sensibility and English Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Volume 1, 179-207.

5 Thornton, R.K.R., ed., *Ivor Gurney Collected Letters* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd, 1991).

Williams work. Had they done so, they would have missed *The Dream of Gerontius*, a performance of which immediately followed, and there is much evidence that both Gurney and Howells were in their different ways Elgar devotees (not least the fact that the 'Angel's Farewell' was performed by Howells at Gurney's funeral). In the first chapter, and occasionally elsewhere, there are further hints at unfamiliarity with the territory. For example, the RCM was founded by George Grove, not by Parry and Stanford. It opened in 1883, not in 1894 (which was the year in which the present building was opened). Stanford was not the organ scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge. Howells was not the organist of Salisbury Cathedral. The 'Wedge' prelude is not a number in *Das Wohltemperirte Klavier*.[6] Hyde Park, not Regents Park, lies behind the Royal Albert Hall. There are no pews in the nave of Gloucester Cathedral. It seems unlikely that Gustav Holst wrote an obituary of Vaughan Williams.[7] Such things suggest that Dr Kennedy's interest in Gurney is *sui generis*, and not an offshoot of an enthusiasm for British music as a whole; but when the focus narrows to Gurney himself, there is a very marked overall improvement. A second edition of this impressive book would benefit from a re-considered first chapter, a bibliography (including, please, full details of Professor Trethowan's essay: see page 456, note 14) and a dry-cleaning of the text to remove the consistent mis-spelling of the noun 'practice' (a minor matter but an irritant in a book largely about a very English poet's lofty flights of traditional English usage).

Two general points emerge from the book. The first is that readers with experience of the exhausting and sometimes frightening task of managing the mentally ill are likely to take a view of Ronald Gurney more sympathetic than the one adopted by Dr Kennedy (and Michael Hurd, and commentators generally). In the years immediately preceding his incarceration, Gurney reached a point at which he needed full-time professional care, and Ronald had a family to look after. Unlike Ivor, Ronald assumed responsibilities and discharged them. Unlike the well-intentioned people who tried to intervene on Ivor's behalf, Ronald did not have the option of returning to the Home Counties and forgetting about his brother's problems; and it may be that those people made their task harder by imperfectly concealing their view of him as socially and intellectually inferior. If the acidic tone of Finzi's letter to Ronald on 21 July 1954 is typical of that correspondence,[8] it is perhaps no wonder that there were difficulties in getting material handed over. In the twenty-first century we see Ivor through a lens ground by the poetry and by the music, and we overlook that for all his brilliance, the post-war Gurney was irresponsible, self-obsessed, stubborn, and sometimes violent. His story underlines the point that great art is sometimes the product of a selfish and, it has to be said, scrounging life.

Secondly, although the practice of writing biographies of creative people is one hallowed by the passage of centuries (Vasari) and one that has led to classics in their own right (Boswell, Austen-Leigh) it has at times a slightly troubling aspect. There are lives and there are lives, and it is not hard to work out why Ken Russell chose Delius and Elgar instead of, say, Frank Bridge and Holst (and Strauss instead of, say, Hindemith). Nor is it hard to work out why biographers are so attracted to Britten. A 'tabloid' idiosyncrasy, such as a sexual leaning out of kilter with society, mental illness, or a racy private life, always makes for an attractive subject. Are we in danger of creating a climate in which the attention paid to an artist's work is a measure of his (or her) personal unorthodoxy and the beauty of the countryside in which he (or she) grew up?

Relf Clark

As a lover of English music, it was not long before I came across the songs of Ivor Gurney. I was immediately and totally enraptured by his song *Sleep,* to the words of the Elizabethan poet John Fletcher. In my opinion, and I think also that of the author of this wonderful biography, it is one of the finest songs in any language. It usually brings tears to my eyes. Following the reading of this biography the tears flowed even more freely but perhaps for different reasons.

The amount of research and dedication that has gone into this biography is extraordinary. I cannot get across the extent in just a brief book-review, but I can confirm that it is considerable. I was already familiar with the impact that the *Fantasia on a theme of Thomas Tallis* by Ralph Vaughan Williams (RVW) had on the teenage budding-composer Ivor Gurney and his great friend Herbert Howells, after they attended the premiere in Gloucester Cathedral in 1910. Kennedy describes this incident beautifully as well as presenting life in Gloucester in the early years of the twentieth century. Whilst the description here is truly heart-warming, her ability to 'set the scene' becomes much more harrowing when she describes Gurney's experiences in the First World War trenches and then ultimately his later years in the large lunatic-asylum at Dartford in Kent. Kennedy maintains that it is difficult to be certain when Gurney's mental state began to deteriorate. Howells believed it began when Gurney was a teenager but Kennedy disagrees, even though there were clear elements of manic-depression early-on which eventually descended into schizophrenia, with elements of bulimia and anorexia to add to the mix. This eventually led to his total (and abject) fifteen-year incarceration.

The limited financial resources of his parents David (a tailor) and Florence, living in Gloucester city centre with four children, seemingly militated against any chance of Ivor being able to study music seriously in London. However, his godfather The Reverend Canon Alfred Cheesman was able to

6 It is the first movement of the Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 548.

7 See page 423, note 4.

8 McVeagh, Diana, ed., *Gerald Finzi's letters, 1915-1956* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021), 899-900.

support his studies - Kennedy finds it rather odd that his teacher in Gloucester, Herbert Brewer (who also taught Howells and Ivor Novello), did not offer help. Gurney went to the Royal College of Music and was taught by the domineering Sir Charles Villiers Stanford who, despite his exasperation with Gurney, considered him one of his best students. It was here that Gurney first came across Marion Scott who ended up playing such an enormous part in his life from then until his death. Her crucial role, good and bad, is meticulously covered by Kennedy.

When war was declared Gurney, like Vaughan Williams, could have applied for a commission rather than enlist as a private soldier but chose not to do so. Both men composed but also rebelled against the endless and pointless parades and button polishing of military life. There were other similarities; at one time Gurney ended up looking after mules, Vaughan Williams horses! It was intriguing to read that wartime village life in Belgium and Northern France, despite being very close to the front line, seemed in many respects to continue as normal during endless attacks and counter-attacks. This juxtaposition of the intensity of battle and quiet village calm seemed to set the scene for such works as *Somme and Severn*. Miraculously, whilst serving in France Gurney was able to write truly-inspired war poetry (as did Sassoon and Owen) and also compose some of his finest music, an achievement only partly frustrated by the lack of suitable writing materials available in the trenches. Later, he witnessed the wanton destruction of villages, agriculture and the deliberate mining and 'booby-trapping' of buildings and crossroads as the Germans retreated. Bombing and bombardment was one thing, but this was gratuitous vandalism on the part of the enemy and removed any vestiges of respect he might have had for his 'fellow sufferers'. This particularly resonated with him as he recalled the wonderful orchards at home in Gloucestershire whilst witnessing their destruction in France and Flanders.

After being shot in the arm and recovering in Rouen he was soon back in the front line, only to be gassed and eventually evacuated to Edinburgh. It was here that he met Annie Drummond, a nurse to whom he eventually became unofficially engaged. She was truly the love of his life, but it was not to be, and their eventual separation prevented his enjoying a happy married life, like that of Herbert Howells. This disappointment continued to cast a long shadow and, as a result, he contemplated suicide; something that became a recurring pattern.

Despite all the incredible hardship of life in the trenches and periods of mental instability in military hospitals, he was able to return to the Royal College of Music after the Armistice. Sir Hubert Parry had been very supportive, but he had sadly died just before the end of the war. His new teacher was none other than Vaughan Williams, also a war veteran who, from then on, played an important part in Gurney's life both financially and as a friend and teacher.

The death of Gurney's father, David, at 57 was certainly the crucial event which seemed to amplify the divisions between him and the rest of the family. Relationships with his mother and younger brother Ronald were always difficult and the situation now worsened. Ronald probably also had psychiatric problems and following David's death he now had to take over the family tailoring business. He had little time or sympathy for his brother's sorry mental state or appreciation of his genius as a poet and composer. Gurney's mental state significantly deteriorated, and in 1922 he was admitted to Barnwood House private asylum on the outskirts of Gloucester. It was most revealing to discover that mental institutions became seriously understaffed during the war and following the war many were now staffed by ex-service men like Gurney. Kennedy points out the irony of those who had survived the horrors and deprivations of the war looking after those that had not, such as Gurney. His constant threats of suicide meant that he was now even more confined than necessary in an institution of this nature. Either way, he was prevented from travelling around the countryside at will and admiring the scenery, sunsets and sunrises of his beloved Gloucestershire. It was so painful for him that, almost daily, he begged to die and regretted that an earlier suicide attempt in hospital in Warrington had not been successful. He was even deprived at one stage of a pen, his main means of communication. One can only imagine the tragic impact on his already precarious psychological state.

Eventually he was transferred to his final 'prison'. The transfer from Gloucestershire to Dartford in Kent was made partly on financial grounds and partly because of his repeated attempts to escape to his beloved hills. He had hoped for a better life away from Barnwood, but it turned out that Dartford was much worse. Initially, the staff were sceptical of his great achievements both as a poet and a composer and, as Kennedy points out with irony, he felt being in an institution would 'drive him mad'. There was no escape. Few attempts were made to 'cure the patient' as his condition was deemed to be chronic with no hope of returning to society. On one occasion he was even given malaria, which for a short period was in vogue as a treatment for mental illness. Not surprisingly it had little effect and worsened his general physical condition.

The help, both financial and supportive, that Vaughan Williams gave to Gurney is most movingly described. Vaughan Williams, unlike most of his friends, was a frequent visitor to Gurney in the asylum and was often accompanied by musicians from the Royal College of Music. This kept Gurney in contact with musical developments and allowed his own music to be discussed and played. Kennedy introduces Charlie Day, a young apprentice attached to the asylum, who became a great friend of Gurney and was able to confirm these visits as they were not recorded by Vaughan Williams himself. Perhaps the greatest conflict of interest was when Gurney escaped from the asylum and eventually turned up at Vaughan Williams' door. RVW's only option was to make the heart-wrenching decision to take him to the police and return him to the asylum.

Sadly, being in an asylum meant that Gurney was deprived of hearing any large-scale orchestral music. During his time at the Dartford asylum he only heard one professional classical concert, with a piano part played by his

fellow student from the days at the Royal College, Arthur Benjamin. In the early years of his confinement, he tried to capture his loss in poetry rather than in composition. Then, from the early 1920s until 1927, he composed prolifically but most compositions remained in manuscript and are now lost. However, some major works such as *Ludlow and Teme* and *The Western Playland* with A E Housman's words set to Gurney's music, were published during this time.

Kennedy discusses in considerable detail the immense number of compositions both poetic and musical which, despite the adverse circumstances, Gurney was able to create whilst he was at Dartford. The composer Gerald Finzi was a great supporter and hoped to edit and publish much of the music which was in manuscript but, sadly, there was antagonism with Gurney's long-enduring colleague Marion Scott, who was reluctant to let go of the manuscripts as they were the only relic and reminder of her long-term 'relationship' with Gurney. The result is that much of this music is still unpublished.

Throughout the book Gurney's love of Gloucestershire, its villages and its hills is palpable which makes even more poignant the move from a local, private small-scale asylum at Barnwood to the large institution in Dartford. One can only imagine the extent of the psychiatric trauma that this move must have created.

Gurney's condition took a final and fatal turn for the worse in 1937 when he contracted tuberculosis. His funeral took place in Twigworth, a little village just outside Gurney's beloved Gloucester and the service was conducted by his godfather and long-time supporter Canon Cheesman. His lifelong friend Herbert Howells attended the funeral, this only two years after the death from polio of his young son, Michael, who is buried in a grave close to Gurney's.

I found it very helpful to have at the beginning a list of the main characters in Gurney's life to which I could refer and which I consulted frequently! Although it is convenient to have photographs included in the text rather than in a separate section, it does mean that they are generally of lower quality than their glossy counterparts. In addition, the rather light weight of the paper used does mean that sometimes a dark shadow is cast over the typeface by the photograph on the previous page.

The Appendices (running to 35 pages) are exemplary, with what is considered 'the most accurate record to date of all Gurney's work, both extant and lost'. Due recognition is given to Philip Lancaster who has collated many of the manuscripts of both Gurney's musical and literary works. As mentioned, much remains unpublished. To my mind this is scandalous.

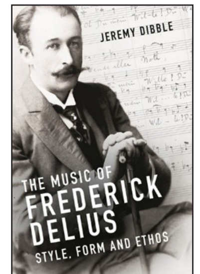
Inevitably, there are a few errors in the text which are unexpected considering the overall scholarship of the book. e.g. the (Royal) Albert Hall does not overlook Regent's Park (p.7); Sir Hubert Parry referred to as Dr Parry (p.13) - he was knighted in 1898. The Temple church is not on the Strand (p.14). However, these obviously do not detract from the excellence of the biography.

In conclusion, the book is a scholarly and academic account of the life of a great poet and composer, which Kate Kennedy has delivered superlatively. The meticulous detail and scholarship can make much of the book a very emotional read, with perhaps some of the detail coming across as a little excessive to some readers. However, to get an overall view of the tragic life of Gurney, I believe that this detail is essential to allow one to 'get under the skin' of this war poet and composer. There is no question that lovers of English music and that of Ivor Gurney owe Kate Kennedy an enormous debt.

David Green

David Green is a retired consultant anaesthetist and intensivist at Kings College Hospital in London. In 2002 he co-founded the English Music Festival. He is a member of the Elgar, British Music and Delius Societies.

The Music of Frederick Delius: Style, form and Ethos
Jeremy Dibble



The Boydell Press

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522 pages.

During his lifetime and in the period since his death (now nearly 90 years ago) Delius has split the opinions of the critics, musicians, and the music-loving public. For those who admire the music, there is a wealth of beautiful melody and adventurous and sophisticated harmonic invention which ensures that Delius can make an orchestra produce a beautiful sound and a successful musical composition. For those who are hostile, Delius's music seems to be formless, vague, and aimless. Some critics in this latter group have condemned the music in a rather unnecessarily hostile manner. For those of us who are fascinated by the man and his music it has been rather frustrating that we have not had a book that will fully explain the remarkable musical beauty which Delius has created.

As Professor Dibble points out in his new study there have of course been several commentators on Delius's music: Max Chop and Philip Heseltine in the composer's lifetime; Arthur Hutchings, Alan Jefferson, Christopher Palmer, Martin Lee-Brown, and Paul Guinery more recently – and in the last few years Andrew Boyle and Daniel Grimley. Sir Thomas Beecham confined himself to the biography of his friend, with relevant comments on the music as and when they were necessary. No doubt all these authors have important and interesting comments to make, but it is not until this new book that we have a full, thorough, and extensive academic analysis of the music. Jeremy Dibble warns us that he does not set out to examine every single work, yet what he does tell us of each work considered is a revelation.

The book will surely satisfy any music lover who wants to understand the background to Delius's compositions and wants to consider how the music is constructed. There is an amount of formal analysis, but it is delivered with Professor Dibble's clear, enthusiastic voice. What does this book set out to do? Dibble investigates the form and style of Delius's music from the very beginning, right up to the last works completed with Eric Fenby's help. We are given an explanation of the form of the music and an evaluation of the lyricism and poetry of each work. We read of the origins and development of the compositions, and the musical connections between many of Delius's major works. The author investigates the harmonic and melodic style of all genres of Delius's music.

Professor Dibble succeeds in his attempt to explain the style, form, and character of Delius's music by carrying out formal analysis of the scores, but this is not dry and alienating. For each work, whilst there are several musical examples used to carry forward the explanation, Dibble also uses tables which explain the structure of a work. To take one example: when writing of *A Mass of Life*, and explaining how Delius has constructed this work, a table explains the structure of the libretto: in this way we are able to dissect and examine the structure of compositions and learn how they are developed.

The book has a clear structure: it is arranged in three sections: Part 1 'The Seeds of Cosmopolitanism' where we are introduced to the young Delius and his unconventional musical apprenticeship – this ends with the composition of *Lebenstanz* between 1898 and 1901. Part 2 'The Voice of Individuality' begins with operatic innovation and the composition of *A Village Romeo and Juliet* and ends with the completion of *An Arabesque*. Part 3 'Fame and Decline' begins with the Two Pieces for Small Orchestra and continues right up to the completion of the *Idyll*.

The Music of Frederick Delius has a wealth of illustrations - some familiar and some less well-known – which give faces to many of the friends and colleagues, such as Grieg and Grainger, mentioned in this study. There are useful appendices including lists of tables, lists of music examples, a thorough bibliography, as well as an index of works and a general index, all of which make the book easier to use.

I have waited many years for such a detailed and rigorous study of the music of Delius and this book exceeds my expectations and hopes. It is a most worthy addition to the bookshelf of anyone who is interested in British and European music from 1890 to 1940.

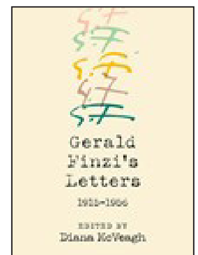
I hope this review shows that Dibble's book adds greatly to our understanding of the music of Delius: surely it will from now be the standard work on his music. For anyone with an open mind there is much here to enrich the understanding of the music. As Dibble says on p476 '…a detailed study of his music shows without a scintilla of doubt, that he perfectly understood the demands and possibilities of form and tonality which had largely been instilled in him at Leipzig and in his conversations with [Edvard] Grieg, [Christian] Sinding, [Ferrucio] Busoni, [Florent] Schmitt and others, that he was no stranger to the classical concepts of sonata form and organicism, and that he learned to apply the potential structural benefits of variation form as an integral part of the expansion of his harmonic language'.

This book has been a pleasure to read, although I must caution the reader that when the author considers the compositions influenced by music Delius heard in the United States, and particularly the music sung and played by the African-American workers on his orange plantation, there is use of language which today would be regarded by most readers as unacceptable. When writing about the music which impressed or influenced Delius one would expect that, in the 21st century, Professor Dibble would use the expression 'African-American melodies' rather than out-moded expressions which will certainly offend a modern readership. It is sad to have to raise this reservation as the book is a major contribution to our understanding of the art of Frederick Delius.

Paul Chennell

Paul Chennell has loved the music of Elgar for over fifty years and has in that time been a keen student of all things Elgarian. His interest in Elgar is part of a wider fascination with the history of music in Britain from the late 19th century through to the mid-20th century. He has been a member of the Delius Society since 1984, serving on the committee of that society for eleven years and editing The Delius Society Journal *for almost five years. Paul has succeeded the late Martin Bird as Editor of the* Collected Correspondence of Edward Elgar.

Gerald Finzi's Letters, 1915-1956
Edited by Diana McVeagh



ISBN
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Boydell Press

1052 pages

This is a monster of a book: more than two and a half inches thick, and presenting transcripts of 1571 letters, all duly footnoted. The book is presented in six chronological Chapters (1915-1933; 1933-1939; 1939-1941; 1941-1945; 1945-51; 1951-1956) each separated by what in another context we might called a brief position paper. Each sequence is footnoted separately to the rest of the text, and together they amount to 1975 footnotes. This wonderful labour of love (and it must have been a labour) preserves in a quite special way the history of the life and times of a very specific musical milieux as well as Finzi's personal musical journey. I know exactly the challenge of transcribing large collections of letters, often having problems getting every word correctly. To prepare a hundred or two is quite a time-consuming task; a collection this large is a literary and musical 'Everest' elegantly conquered: a quite outstanding achievement.

It is worth pointing out that it also includes one or two quite useful lists of one sort or another – a list of correspondents and a chronology; brief biographies of 22 participants in what has been dubbed 'Gerald Finzi's Circle', and a list of Finzi's works, made particularly useful by including details of first performances, something that all authors of books on composers should emulate. The list of Finzi's writings is remarkably short, as is the Bibliography. There are two indexes – of Finzi's works and a seventeen-page index of names. The latter allows us to note those which have substantial lists of references signalling Finzi's immediate circle – we may in particular note: Arthur Bliss; William Busch; Howard Ferguson; Ivor Gurney; Herbert Howells; Robin Milford; Edmund Rubbra; Cedric Thorpe Davie and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

For readers of the *Journal* perhaps I should start with Elgar. On 19 September 1955 Finzi wrote to the composer Cedric Thorpe Davie: '. . . the new Diana McVeagh book on Elgar is first-rate. She's a new name to me & must be young, but she really has more acumen than most of the pip-squeaks who write musical criticism. I wish she would do one on Parry . . .'. He clearly went on to write to Diana congratulating her, and Diana prints her reply from 11 February: 'It was extraordinarily good of you to write to me about my Elgar. Critics are paid to say something and friends are expected to say something, but a letter such as yours is especially gratifying because there was nothing but sheer kindness to prompt it'. Finzi went on to suggest that she should next turn her attention to Parry but Diana remarked: 'so little of Parry is performed nowadays that it means judging vast quantities of stuff I had never heard, & I distrust my "inner ear"'.

Vera Somerfield (later Strawson) was a friend of Finzi's elder sister Kate. Ten years his senior the letters to her are the earliest surviving letters written by Finzi. (The first letter in the collection was actually written by the composer Ernest Farrar to Gerald Finzi's mother saying how he finds her son a very interesting pupil.) Finzi, writing on 7 September 1923 from the Worcester Three Choirs tells how he was there as 'Elgar walked down the aisle & started talking a few yards in front of us. Need I say that he wears stays?' There are 44 indexed references to Elgar. In 1931 Finzi writes defending the Elgar Cello Concerto at a time when it did not have the profile it enjoys today. '. . . I'm a heretic about the Elgar concerto, though I can quite understand how it nauseates some people. I know it's not all gold, but its glitter always moves me'.

It's fascinating to witness Finzi and his friends, when all were still young, exchanging their private assessments of the new music as it is first heard. Edmund Rubbra, then making his name as critic, composer and pianist, would report to Finzi how he rated what was new. I was interested to see his assessments of the new music which he was receiving for review. In January 1936 he was ecstatic about Vaughan Williams' *Five Tudor Portraits*, but wrote: 'I've also got Benjamin Britten's new Suite for Violin & Piano [Op 6], Britten is rapidly going to the dogs! It's as dry as a bone, & although the violin part is for a virtuoso, Antoinette [Chaplin, Rubbra's first wife] says even so it's not interesting to play'. This not always sympathetic response to Britten is felt by several in the Finzi circle. On 15 December 1945 Anthony Scott (Finzi's only private composition pupil) had written to Finzi complaining that he found Britten's wartime *Sinfonia da Requiem* 'completely barren and damnably insincere'. Finzi responded that he had heard the first performance and remarked '. . . it's one of the few works that has ever got me to sleep. But then I'm allergic to Britten's music! It's beyond me the Britten boom'. This reviewer, as someone who loves the music of Finzi *and* Britten, as an observer from 75 years on finds it hard to understand their position.

By its treatment, broken into chronological chapters, the various themes of this epistolary life appear with contemporary vividness in succession. We need to remember the fact that thanks to a small private income he was free to develop his musical career without being overly concerned about the need for an appointment and a regular salary. As a group-portrait of a succession of highly-individual composers and artists, set in the framework of day-to-day music life, it is remarkably vivid. This is particularly true of those names no longer enjoying a high profile today. Thanks to the sheer number of letters transcribed, Diana McVeagh presents us with not only a reference source on Finzi's life and times, but also a fascinating bedside book, though owing to its bulk not one easy to manage in bed. But it does lie flat when open! What we have is another essential corner-stone study of British music in the twentieth century from Boydell: recommended.

Lewis Foreman

Diana McVeagh with Stephen Banfield and the majority of the Finzi family in September 2005 at the launch party for her earlier book on Gerald Finzi (photograph Lewis Foreman).

DG

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'The British Project'
Elgar: Sospiri, Op. 70
Britten: Sinfonia da Requiem, Op. 20
Walton: Symphonic Suite: Troilus & Cressida, arranged Palmer
Vaughan Williams: Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla

The title here is disappointingly misleading, encouraging us to expect further releases to follow this brilliant one. But since Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla has decided to relinquish her regrettably short-lived and occasionally spasmodic music directorship of the CBSO for 'family reasons' (watch this space) this project may well go no further. Which is a huge pity, as the examples on this CD offer vibrant, fresh accounts of established masterpieces as well as of neglected ones, one of them a major one which desperately needs to become part of the repertoire canon of British music. This is the Symphonic Suite Christopher Palmer created from William Walton's ill-starred *Troilus and Cressida*, which has had such a bumpy ride in the opera-house for various reasons. The opera deserves so much better. Palmer's reconstruction brings all the essence of this beautiful music to life, from the pulsating, Sibelius-like opening, through the combined glittering and yearning of the Scherzo, and on into the searing finale. Along the way there is the surging yet troubled music for the lovers (Walton dedicated the opera to his feisty Argentinian wife Susana), and all of this is conveyed with huge grasp and commitment by Mirga. Tight wind colourings and eloquent solo strings add to the Mediterranean feel of the Trojan setting, looking back to Walton's First Symphony and forward to his Cello Concerto, so evocative of the lapping shores of his adopted home on the island of Ischia.

The disc begins with an Elgar *Sospiri* touching in its dignity, with plangent downward slurs and well-captured balance between the properly prominent harp and strings.

There follows an absolutely gripping Britten *Sinfonia da Requiem*, its rasping bass opening leading to a measured, muffled tread of grief much more restrained than in the composer's own recording with the New Philharmonia Orchestra half a century ago. From sustained string lines, painfully thrusting, a grinding climax gradually emerges, leading into the quicksilver *Dies Irae*, with lip-secure trumpets and snappy rhythms.

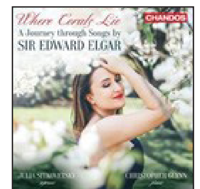
The disintegration of this movement is almost balletic, a la Prokofiev (Death of Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*), leading us into the gentle, still quietly lamenting 'Requiem Aeternam', its rocking underlay always a consoling presence.

Completing this treasurable and unmissable release is a compelling account of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, atmospherically captured in the wonderfully versatile acoustic of Birmingham's Symphony Hall. Inner detail in the big sweeping passages adds to the impact, and the distancing of the offstage solo group evokes the sound of a consort of viols. We also get the impression of an organ sound in some of the quietly sustained passages, an effect I have noticed before, not least on the Sargent/ Philharmonia recording which I have loved since the early 1960s!

In this CBSO recording the final restatement of Tallis' evocative theme, with questing viola solo, remains indelibly poignant in the memory.

Christopher Morley

'Where Corals Lie – a Journey through Songs by Sir Edward Elgar'
Julia Sitkovetsky (soprano), Christopher Glynn (piano)



Chandos

CHAN20236

First things first, with many congratulations on turning this release around so quickly, set down in spring, released in autumn – and recorded in the Yehudi Menuhin School, founded by the youthful young violinist who invigorated Elgar's final years.

The acoustic here is wonderful, but recorded balance between soprano Julia Sitkovetsky and pianist Christopher Glynn is not too satisfactory; the fault lies at the feet of the composer.

It was perhaps a mistake to begin with *Sea Pictures*, conceived so perfectly for voice and orchestra. Elgar's own piano version of this richly-textured song-cycle gives a thick prominence to the keyboard, clouding and indeed distancing vocal enunciation. Some of the piano contributions come over as grotesque, with unidiomatic octave *tremolandi* in the left hand. The orchestration is one of the redeeming features of this less-than-perfect work, but its removal here makes matters uncomfortable, not least for the heroic soprano; and we are more used to hearing the piece sung in mezzo-soprano registers.

Offerings conceived initially for voice and piano fare much better in this 'Journey through Songs by Sir Edward Elgar' (I don't understand why we need the honorific spattering the editorial content, though Elgar would have loved it), emerging with spontaneity and freshness. Items from the *Sieben Lieder* (note the German at this aspiring stage in the composer's career) make telling points in these performances, such as the touching two-voice dialogue in *A Song of Autumn*, and the *Rondel* a poignant link across the centuries to Froissart, subject of Elgar's first great orchestral overture.

Sitkovetsky responds willingly to the declamatory soul-baring of *The Torch*, words by Pietro d'Alba (Peter the white rabbit, an Elgar alias), and Glynn handles well the spectacular piano introduction to the immediately subsequent *The River*. *Pleading*, with so many tempo changes in its short

span, benefits from the soprano's unaffected simplicity of delivery, and *The Muleteer's Serenade* is a captivating example of Elgar's Spanish affinities.

The Self Banished is a fine example of the well-read Elgar's wide range of literary sources, and usually he landed on a winner, such as here with the 17th-century poet Edmund Waller, Elgar homing into him for this setting whilst still in his teens. Christopher Glynn negotiates the generous accompaniment with huge satisfaction.

But this is a bit of a problem with Elgar songs. The piano introductions are so fulsome, so 'listen to me' instead of getting to the kernel of the text in question. This release reveals the many composers to whom Elgar turned for inspiration, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Strauss and several French contemporaries among them, but their introductions were concise, immediately mood-setting, unlike many of these overblown announcements.

We end with a return to transcriptions. In Moonlight is an effective enough word-setting of the viola solo 'Canto Popolare' in the scintillating *In the South* Overture, 'When the Spring Comes Round' is a dutifully heroic excerpt from *Une voix dans le désert*, composed early on in the Great War by Elgar to support the Belgian war effort, and *Pansies* takes us right back to the start of Elgar's career, and his composition of *Salut d'Amour* for his future wife Caroline Alice Roberts.

Julia Sitkovetsky and Christopher Glynn do their best in what is admittedly uneven, often unidiomatic material. Insert-notes are generally greatly informative, though no-one, not even in all my compendious library of Elgar books, can tell me who was 'Yvonne', dedicatee of *The Torch*.

Christopher Morley

Barbirolli Society

SJB 1102-03

Elgar: Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85[1];
Sibelius: Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47[2].
[1]Jacqueline du Pré (cello); [2]Alfredo Campoli (violin).
[1]BBC SO, [2]Hallé Orchestra, cond. Sir John Barbirolli.
Rec. [1]Bolshoi Hall, Moscow, 7 January 1967; [2]Royal College of Advanced Technology, Salford, 8 December 1964.
(CD plus DVD of Sibelius performance).

This is an important release for lovers of great string playing, though not necessarily for the reasons one might expect.

In 1996 the Testament label issued a performance of the Elgar Cello Concerto, recorded in Prague on 3 January 1967 by Jacqueline du Pré and Sir John Barbirolli at the first concert of the BBC SO tour of Central and Eastern Europe. Now the Barbirolli Society releases the performance given four days later in Moscow.

There are enough distinct differences between the two for me to be able to come down definitely on one side. In her note, du Pré's friend and biographer Elizabeth Wilson calls the Prague performance 'more classical' or more

controlled. It is easy to imagine that on the first evening of the tour, in a venue (the Smetana Hall, I would guess) and a city strange to her, du Pré would be on her best behaviour. Whereas in Moscow, where she was known as a former student, had already played the Haydn D major under the baton of her teacher Rostropovich, and had friends in the audience, she would feel able to let her hair down a little.

The movement timings for the two interpretations are virtually identical in the *Adagio*, and not very much slower in Moscow for the other three, so it is a matter of mood. In Moscow we hear the familiar digging into the strings in the opening recitative; and in the cello's first statement of the undulating theme after the *tutti*, du Pré plays with great *Innigkeit*. In the link to the *Scherzo*, one or two notes are infinitesimally flat, but the *Allegro molto* is despatched with her usual virtuosity – there is very slight untidiness at the end. The *Adagio* brings intensity, partly expressed through bow pressure, and is very moving, proceeding in long phrases. She picks up the rhythm of the Finale straight away, is eloquent in the recitative, and again deploys considerable virtuosity.

Undoubtedly du Pré emotes more in Moscow, where she is more boldly and forwardly recorded, and your choice will depend on whether you like your Elgar more contained or more Romantic. I prefer Prague, not least because the cello tone is superior. I love the inward way in which du Pré plays from around 9:40 in the Prague finale – in Moscow she almost overdoes it. Whether you agree with me or not, it is good to have another du Pré Elgar from her brief prime.

Even more important, because Alfredo Campoli never recorded the Sibelius Concerto in the studio, is his 1964 live performance with Barbirolli, broadcast on BBC2 on 16 March the following year. Both the audio and the video come from the Campoli Collection.

Campoli is in tune at the start, which is more than I can say for some competitors, and JB conducts with considerable grandeur in the finest movement, the first. On the CD, Sydney Errington's important viola solos are not very loud and you have to turn the volume up to get a reasonable orchestral sound – even at lower volume, there is heavy tape hiss.

The orchestra sets up expectancy in the *Adagio di molto* and Campoli exudes a full G-string tone without overdoing it or discolouring it, as so many do. He really makes the rhythm dance in the main theme of the Finale – and he is the man for *spiccato* and upbow *staccato*. I enjoy his performance very much and it is wonderful to have it on DVD as well.

The black-and-white picture is pretty good for the period – the video comes from the BBC International Concert Hall series – and the sound is excellent. It is terrific to be able to see Campoli actually doing the business: nothing is faked or half-baked. Errington's solos come across better but he is not seen playing them – in the first, the camera is solidly on the violinist and in the second, he is obscured by Barbirolli. Other members of the orchestra are picked out and it is good to see Martin Milner leading. At the end there appears to be genuine warmth between those two Italian East Enders Campoli and Barbirolli, as well there might be.

Tully Potter

Albion Records
ALBCD 048

RVW FROM AMERICA

Concerto for Two Pianofortes in C Major – premiere recording
Vladimir Golschmann, Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia, Arthur Whittemore and Jack Lowe, duo-piano. 1950
Flos Campi
Robert Hull, Concert Hall Chamber Orchestra, Cornell A Capella Chorus, Francis Tursi, viola. 1952
Fantasia (quasi variazione) on the 'Old 104th' Psalm Tune – premiere recording
Robert Hull, Rochester Chamber Orchestra, Cornell A Capella Chorus, John Hunt, piano, John Beavan, organ. 1953
Folk Song arrangements for chorus:
The Turtle Dove
The Dark-Eyed Sailor
John Dory – premiere recording
Robert Hull / Cornell A Capella Chorus / A. Stratton McAllister, baritone. 1953

Another interesting release from the enterprising Albion Records wing of the RVW Society. The principal work on this issue must be the Piano Concerto in the version for two pianos completed in 1946, with RVW's involvement, by Joseph Cooper (the renowned pianist and, later, broadcaster). The work was written for Harriet Cohen and premiered in 1933: this dedication was perhaps one of VW's rare miscalculations as by all accounts the music did not lie easily under her fingers. Nevertheless it is said that Bartók was very impressed by her performance of it. Recent virtuosi such as Howard Shelley and Ashley Wass have shown us in their recordings that the single-player original is a more-than viable version. The outer movements are quite percussive (indeed Bartók comes to mind at times) whereas the central *Romanza* has much beauty. The concerto is one of the group of works (including Job and the Fourth Symphony) that showed RVW employing more astringent harmonies.

This performance by Arthur Whittemore and Jack Lowe, with the rather quaintly named Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia[1] under Vladimir Golschmann, was recorded in 1950. Naturally the mono sound is restricted compared to a modern digital stereo recording, but after a minute or two one's ears rapidly adjust. This is an impressive performance, given by two of the foremost US pianists of their day. My 'desert island' choice would have to be one of the modern digital recordings with one piano, but there is much to enjoy here.

The *Fantasia (quasi variazione) on the Old 104th* is a neglected piece. It was completed in 1949 and first performed at the 1950 Three Choirs with RVW conducting. It was not written to a commission and, as Ronald Grames' excellent liner notes put it, seems to have been composed purely on some impulse of the composer's. The 'Old 104th' is the metrical psalm tune from Ravenscroft's Psalter of 1621. It is an unusual piece, for orchestra with chorus, plus a virtuosic extended piano part. It only appears to have been recorded once before, in 1970 by Boult with Peter Katin as the soloist. So a second version is very welcome, particularly as the performance is a splendid one. The virtuoso solo part is played with great bravura by the British pianist John Hunt (1905–1976) with the Rochester Chamber Orchestra and Cornell A Capella Chorus under Robert Hull. Choir and Orchestra are excellent. The optional part for organ is included here, but is omitted on the 1970 recording. Set down in 1953, the sound is very good: indeed it is better than the 1970 EMI sound which is congested in places, at least on the CD transfer I have in my library.

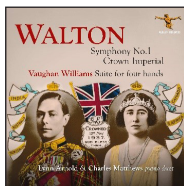
Flos Campi is a work I confess I have long struggled to love. I am not alone – even RVW's great friend Holst declaring he 'couldn't get hold of *Flos* a bit'. So I was surprised to find myself thoroughly enjoying the performance recorded here by the Concert Hall Chamber Orchestra and Cornell A Capella Chorus under Robert Hull. The difficult solo viola part is very well played by Francis Tursi and all the performers give a bravura rendition of the piece which quite transformed it for this reviewer. RVW apparently thought highly of this recording and I am not surprised. The 1952 recording is clear, and although the frequency range is obviously limited this does not detract from one's enjoyment.

The CD is rounded off by performances of what the original recording company (Concert Hall) described as Three Sea Shantys. This they are not, although they all deal with sailors. Once again, excellent performances captured in 1953 with the Cornell A Capella Chorus, Robert Hull conducting and the baritone A. Stratton McAllister contributing a fine solo in *The Turtle Dove*.

A very enjoyable reissue. Ronald Grames has clearly achieved miracles in transcribing these recordings from LP originals of the period. He also contributes detailed and fascinating notes on the works and the performers. If only all CDs were as well presented. The whole CD has given me much pleasure and I shall certainly be re-visiting the performances of *Old 104th* and *Flos Campi* many times. Highly recommended to those who wish to explore some less well-known but very rewarding RVW. The 'Old 104th' tune refuses to leave my brain – a very pleasant affliction!

David Morris

1 The Dell Music Centre was originally built in 1929 as the summer home of the Philadelphia Orchestra. This outdoor amphitheatre continuously served as the summer venue for concert presentations of the Philadelphia Orchestra. From 1930 to 1976, The Philadelphia Orchestra was presented as The Robin Hood Dell Orchestra for this summer concert series.



Albion Records

ALBCD 047

Walton, First Symphony, *Crown Imperial*
Vaughan Williams, *Suite for Four Hands on one pianoforte*
Lynn Arnold and Charles Matthews, piano duet

On 14 October 1912, the Elgars returned to Severn House after a holiday in the Lake District. Elgar at that point faced the task of preparing for an LSO concert on 25 November which included the Symphony in D minor of Franck. He did not know the work (which seems surprising) and therefore asked Alice Stuart Wortley (as she then was) to obtain an arrangement for piano duet, so that he could learn it by playing it with her. What prevented him from obtaining a copy himself, or simply running through the full score at the piano, is not clear (perhaps he saw here a way of achieving some unexceptionable intimacy with the Windflower). At any rate, a copy was procured, and they went through the work on 4 and 8 November and again a few days before the concert.[1] Nowadays, a conductor in the same position as Elgar could enrich a study of the score by means of CDs, old LPs, radio broadcasts, live performances, or combinations of these things. In the somewhat different conditions that obtained in Elgar's day, piano solo and piano duet arrangements of orchestral works played important roles for professional and amateur musicians alike, and one assumes that such arrangements were a major source of publishers' income.[2]

In 1937, when Herbert Murrill (1909-1952) prepared the Walton transcriptions recorded here, he and the publishers (OUP) were no doubt aiming at the essentially domestic clientele to which Elgar and the Windflower had belonged, and whether they contemplated public performance, and recordings, is perhaps a moot point. It is certainly the case that for all Murrill's ingenuity, and for all the very fine musicianship and truly remarkable stamina of Lynn Arnold and Charles Matthews, the transcription of the First Symphony does not entirely succeed. The piano being a percussion instrument, its ability to sustain a note is by its very nature severely limited. Much of the devastating impact of the symphony in the concert hall is to do with the way in which wind and especially brass instruments can sustain notes and effect *crescendi*. To illustrate the point being made here, take bar 13 of the first movement, where the first oboe enters with a treble D flat marked *pp espress*. The note is held until bar 16, and in bar 15 Walton prescribes a *crescendo*. Even with the sustaining pedal, that very soft D flat has vanished by bar 15, and it was always going to be quite impossible to make it get louder in that or any other bar. Such impossibilities abound in this score, so that the overall effect of the transcription, however well played, is to convey the idea that Walton's work is merely pretty and agreeable, which does it a disservice. These reservations apply less to the transcription of *Crown Imperial*, but there can be no doubt that Murrill's version for the organ is a good deal more effective, and no doubt that there is no substitute for the colour and swagger of the magnificent original.

Dating from 1893 and comprising a prelude, minuet, sarabande and gigue, the Vaughan Williams work is a student exercise, but the liner notes' claim that the work is 'beautiful in its own right' is amply borne out by this recording. There is a parallel here with the young Elgar's using as a model the first movement of the Mozart Symphony in G minor, K.550, for it is clear that the work shows the prentice Vaughan Williams, like Elgar before him, easing himself into his craft by filling an eighteenth-century mould. The work is charming and deserves to be better known.

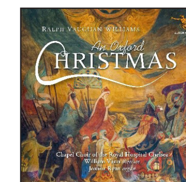
The liner notes give as the justification for this unusual pairing (of unusual items) the fact that both composers were heirs of Elgar, which is demonstrably true, and that the two were on friendly terms, which may well be true but does not appear to be relevant. It might have been better if the entire disc had been devoted to works of Vaughan Williams arranged for four hands,[3] or if instead of the Walton works the choice had been one of the four-hand works of Ravel, a sometime teacher of VW, e.g., *Ma Mère l'Oye*. But presumably that would have gone against the essentially English grain of Albion Records.

Relf Clark

1 See Moore, Jerrold Northrop, ed., *Edward Elgar The Windflower Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 110-112.

2 Elgarians are of course aware of Karg-Elert's arrangements of the symphonies, and of the piano solo (Elgar) and piano duet (West, McNaught) versions of the *Variations*. There is much more.

Ralph Vaughan Williams: An Oxford Christmas
Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea; Joshua Ryan, organ;
William Vann, director



Albion Records

ALBCD050

Another Christmas carol CD? Yes, but with a difference. Many choir members will be familiar with *The Oxford Book of Carols* first published in 1928, a year which also saw the first broadcast of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge. This CD contains twenty carols from the OBC arranged by Vaughan Williams, two of them with contributions by Martin Shaw, and a further two that were published later.

The OBC was the brainchild of The Reverend Percy Dearmer, who had worked with Martin Shaw and Ralph Vaughan Williams on *The English Hymnal* and other collections. The OBC contained over 200 carols, including many arranged by Vaughan Williams. The accompanying booklet includes a history of the publication in an excellent essay by Jeremy Summerly, who reminds us that Dearmer and Shaw aimed to weed out Victorian sentimentality from collections of hymn tunes. Vaughan Williams and Shaw carried out research into old English melodies and some of their finds are included on this CD, produced by Albion Records as a companion to *A Vaughan Williams Christmas* (2016).

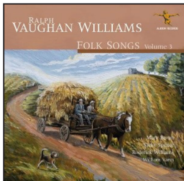
3 See Kennedy, Michael, *A Catalogue of the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964/1982), 320.

Ten of the tracks are believed to be first recordings; many are far from well-known and deserve to be heard. Only four were familiar to me, though more experienced choir members may know others. Vaughan Williams and Shaw recommended that these carols should never be sung straight through in the same way; the carols here are recorded by this excellent professional choir with a mixture of unaccompanied, accompanied and solo verses. Texts are included, along with a commentary on each carol giving details of its origins. The notes include some interesting facts. *Sussex Carol*, when heard in the 1860s, had about ninety verses – just four are included here. *Psalm of Sion* was originally somewhat shorter with forty-four stanzas, of which seven are included. The tune assigned by Vaughan Williams can be found in both Queen Elizabeth's and Lady Neville's Virginal Books.

Three of the carols (*The Bellman's Song, Job, Sussex Carol*) are performed with more than one tune. The periods covered by the selection reflect a wide spread, with some texts and tunes dating from the fifteenth century and some from the Victorian era. Others have been put together from various sources. For example, the words of *If ye would hear the angels sing* were written by Dorothy Greenwell (1821-1882) and set to a psalm tune from 1539 adapted by Vaughan Williams and Shaw.

The singing is beautiful throughout, with some excellent soloists taking individual verses, and the sound is of a high quality. Some people may find there is too little contrast between the carols but this would be hard to avoid, given the nature of the collection, and there is good variation within each carol. Three small errors in the booklet were noticed after printing but these will be corrected in the version available for downloading. It is certainly different from the usual carol collection; hardly any would make for easy congregational singing and it is fascinating to hear the results of Vaughan Williams's and Shaw's work. An ideal Christmas present for lovers of good choral singing.

Ruth Hellen



Albion Records

ALBCD 044

Ralph Vaughan Williams: Folk Songs Volume 3
Mary Bevan (soprano) Nicky Spence (tenor)
Roderick Williams (baritone), William Vann (piano)
Chorus: Helen Ashby, Kate Ashby sopranos; Cara Curran alto; Benedict Hymas tenor; James Arthur, Nicholas Ashby basses

With this disc, we are three-quarters of the way through this four-part project by the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and Albion Records to record all 80 of the folk songs in English that RVW arranged for voice and piano or violin. This volume is built around 'Folk Songs from the Eastern Counties' and is doubly noteworthy because this is the earliest of RVW's collections in this series - and he collected them all himself. Only three of the tracks on the discs have been released before and we are told fifteen of the twenty-one tracks are world premieres.

The same soloists feature from the earlier marvellous recordings in the project and the CD starts with Roderick Williams' haunting unaccompanied opening of *Bushes & Briars* – the very first of the more than 800 songs RVW collected – which is exquisite. The 'Folk Songs from the Eastern Counties' – the second publication in Cecil Sharp's 'Folk Songs of England' thence unfold their beauties, though we are warned, via RVW's 1908 preface, that 'It is not to be supposed that they are the exclusive property of the counties to which they are credited; all that is claimed for them is that they are certainly sung in these counties, and that most of the melodies have not as yet been discovered elsewhere'.

Following the fifteen beautifully delivered songs, William Vann plays the 'Twelve Traditional Country Dances, Collected and Described by Maud Karpeles'. They are charming, were collected from wide and far, were meant to be danced to, and what could be jollier than that? This hides the machinations behind their arrangement and publication: it appears that two people tried their hand, so unsatisfactorily to RVW that 'I set to work after breakfast and did them myself', only for the redoubtable Maud to profess herself equally dissatisfied! After much to-ing and fro-ing, RVW wrote in exasperation 'Here are your tunes back – if they are wrong now I think you had better do them yourself & I will look them over if you like. My spirit is quite broken!' It was a delight for a version of 'Humpty Dumpty' to come through the speakers in the course of William Vann's sprightly recital.

The singers return to sing works from much later in RVW's career, from the 1959 Penguin Book of English Folk Songs. The accompaniments are sparse, illustrating the dictum of this book that the songs should really be sung unaccompanied, a far cry from the art songs arrangements from the beginning of the century.

We learnt from Volume 1 of the series that *The Motherland Song Book* was an 'Official Publication of the League of the Arts for National and Civic Ceremony', it came out in the second decade of the century and RVW wanted the volumes to represent the best of English Sea Song. Volume 3 concludes with two further examples, filled out with chorus, bringing another superb issue to a rousing conclusion.

All my previously stated compliments to the singers, the pianist, the production, design and notes can be applied to this disc. I find it interesting that the musings I made in reviewing Volume 1 have been addressed in the notes to No.3 making the series, once completed, a splendid survey of the art, artlessness and artifice of the constituent parts of the twentieth-century folk music revival, amply illustrated by a treasure trove of first-rate music making.

Steven Halls

RECORDING NOTES - 1920 TO 1921

Elgar's first recording session after Lady Elgar's death in April 1920, took place on 16 November 1920 when he and Beatrice Harrison completed the recording of the Cello Concerto by successfully recording the third movement. They had started the Concerto recording in December 1919. The first eight subjects of the *Variations on an Original Theme* were also set down, but some takes had to be destroyed as unsatisfactory. On 14 December Elgar attended the Gramophone Company in Regent Street to listen to the results. On 11 May 1921 Elgar returned to Hayes to record further Variations. The Theme and Variations I, II XI, XII, XIII and XIV were successfully recorded and on 10 June he went to the Gramophone Company to select the best takes.

On 20 July Elgar was invited to open the Gramophone Company's new premises at 363-7 Oxford Street and made a long and important speech underlying the significance of the recording industry.

> The days when the gramophone was held to be nothing more than a scientific toy have gone by; now it takes its rightful position, and a very important position, in the world of music. That it has already a definite place in our musical life is revealed by the fact that our leading academies and colleges are making extended use of it for educational purposes. A daily increasing number of serious musicians recognise the value of the gramophone in creating and instructing listeners, and, I must add, intelligent listeners … The gramophone can lead listeners to appreciate music from a point of view embracing structure and effect apart from any responsibility of execution.

From Sussex on 27 July, he wrote to Alice Stuart of Wortley: 'My speech at the Gramophone opening was shockingly reported – it was quite long & important – the reporters only seem to have noted a few stupid things which they turned inside out'. Thus on 20 and 21 August, whilst at Brinkwells, Elgar set about preparing an accurate and fuller version to be printed in *The Voice* (the Gramophone Company's in-house magazine) later that month.

Since his wife's death Elgar had written no new music but in April/May 1921 he transcribed for orchestra Bach's Fugue in C minor which was to be premiered by Eugene Goossens on 27 October. The Gramophone Company considered it 'a very brilliant orchestral work' and decided to approach Elgar to record it. Thus, a recording session was arranged for 7 December to include an extract from *King Olaf* – 'A Little Bird in the Air' and part of *In the South*. Carice came with him: 'Out early – telephoned to Father & settled to go with him to Gramophone place. [Hayes] Went up – lunched at Victoria & met him at flat. Car came at 1 – drove down there – he recorded Bach fugue, King Olaf (1 record) & part of In the South. Very interesting. All very nice. Drove back – he changed & rested …'.

Another session was arranged for 30 December to complete the overture. Carice once again was there: 'Met Father & went off in car to Gramophone place – making records of In the South. Left about 5, got to flat about 6. Father changed & had a short rest …'.

Elgar's contract was to expire at the end of the year and after looking at the sales figures for his recordings from 1915 – and even though these showed a slight loss – it was decided to offer him a new contract for three years, with a retaining fee of £500 per annum. In return he was to conduct a minimum of four sessions a year. In December 1921 Elgar indicated that he was happy with these terms and was prepared to sign a new contract when it was ready.

Lunch to launch the opening of HMV's Oxford Street premises 20 July 1921 (Arthur Reynolds' archive)

Acknowledgement is made to Jerrold Northrop Moore's Elgar on Record *(Oxford University Press, 1974) in compiling these notes. Elgar's speech can be found on pages 38 – 41.*

Kevin Mitchell

100 YEARS AGO …

In preparation for the impending departure from Severn House, Elgar and Carice spent 2 July 1921 sorting through his manuscripts: ‘Father went through all his sketches. M.S.S. etc. sad work. Destroyed much & got all in order. At it all day’. They finished sorting the manuscripts the following day and Elgar lunched with the Stuarts of Wortley where he met Dickens’ daughter, Mrs Perugini.[1] On 4 July Elgar went to the Literary Society dinner and the next day he and Carice attended the Royal Academy exhibition: ‘very amused at pictures – hardly any we liked’. In the evening Elgar went to a dinner where there was a birthday party for the cellist Guilhermina Suggia. Elgar travelled to Hereford on 6 July, staying at Brockhampton Court, for the first full-chorus rehearsal on the following day of *The Apostles* - which was to be performed at the September Three Choirs Festival. This could have been the occasion of the disastrous rehearsal recalled by Lady Hull, when Elgar’s ‘manner was forbidding in the extreme’. She recalled: ‘Elgar walked on to the platform and took up the baton without even looking at the chorus, much less giving them any sort of greeting. He announced the number at which he wanted to start in such a quiet voice that no one could hear him and there was an embarrassed silence … By this time the chorus was thoroughly jittery, their entries were tentative and … they began to sing flat’. Eventually Elgar ‘walked off saying “You don’t appear to know anything of the work”’. He left his score of the work in the rehearsal room and wrote to Hull asking him to keep it for him. In his absence Carice ‘finished sorting & relabelling M.S.S. & put them away’. Norman Allin, a distinguished bass singer, came to Severn House on 14 July to go through the part of Judas, which he was to sing at the Hereford Festival: ‘sang finely’,[2] and Mr Colledge came to discuss the opening of The Gramophone Company’s new premises later in the month.[3] Felix Salmond played platepool with Elgar on 16 July and ‘Father read aloud some stories from Twilight of the Gods’. The next day Elgar was busy with his letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* ‘following up previous correspondence re Scott’s assimilation of Shakespeare’ which was printed on 21 July, and on 18 July there was a visit to the estate agent, Hamptons, about the sale of Severn House. Later Morris Hadley (the son of Arthur Hadley, thirteenth President of Yale, from 1899 to 1921) and his wife Katherine called – ‘nice visit – very American – gave them tea’ commented Carice.[4]

On 20 July came the opening of HMV’s premises: ‘Car fetched Father 12.45 & took him to Oxford St new gramophone buildings for lunch & he to open the premises. Made a splendid speech – all delighted - Landon Ronald, Sir Hugh Allen, Sir A Mackenzie there … Back by 4’. The next day Elgar and Carice went to Brinkwells: ‘Lovely drive down much cooler though sunny … All settled by evening’. This was their last visit to the cottage and Elgar and Carice spent many quiet warm July days enjoying the Sussex countryside. On 25 July Carice noted: ‘Sat in field & watched barley being cut – only 3 rabbits came out’. He wrote to Alice Stuart of Wortley on 27 July saying: ‘I have let the days go by to see if it possible to say anything not melancholy about this dear place – but it is too sad. I do not sleep & can do nothing all day but wonder what it is all for, what it means & what the end may be… Living here is difficult … milk & eggs very scarce …Carice manages wonderfully & our little London maid likes it – for the time’. He wrote again on 2 August:

1 Catherine Perugini (1839 – 1929) Dickens’ youngest surviving daughter and his favourite child.

2 Norman Allin (1864 – 1973) bass who studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music.

3 George Leyden Colledge (1877 - ?) Recording Manager for the Gramophone Company in the 1920s.

4 Arthur Hadley (1856 – 1930) President of Yale. Morris Hadley (1894 – 1979) a New York Lawyer.

‘we are sorrowfully putting things on one side here for the final departure & marking things to be given to the villagers – the piano will go to Carice’s new home – it is all very depressing but necessary & must be faced & is being faced … The place is not the same as it was in the lonely war years – there are so many men at work in the woods now’. On 3 August he visited Landon Ronald at Crowborough: ‘Father left … at 8,45 – Mr Aylwin took his luggage down - & brought back word he had gone all right – So misty could only see smoke of train & no handkerchief’, and she found when he returned from Crowborough on 6 August that he ‘looked much better’.[5] The next day Elgar was involved with plans for the forthcoming Three Choirs Festival, which was to be the first under Percy Hull’s direction and on 11 August Carice learnt of ‘Wonderful surprise of £500 wedding present to me from Mr Volkert of Schotts – in memory of Mother. Father delighted’. On 18 August Sir Julian Corbett came for tea: ‘Father walked part of the way back through the wood. Saw Walter Aylwin make fresh fires of rubbish in the cornfield – Wonderful sight. Lovely moon’.[6] On 20 August Elgar ‘began to work at speech he [had] made at the opening of Gramophone premises for the Voice’ (the Gramophone Company’s in house magazine) and finished it the next day, before Elgar’s final departure from the cottage: ‘Very sad at leaving’, but Carice stayed for a few more days.

He travelled to Hereford for further rehearsals for the Three Choirs Festival, followed by a few days with his sister Pollie at Stoke Prior. Elgar joined Carice at the Langham Hotel on 29 August prior to more rehearsals at Morley Hall for the Festival. On 31st he went to Queen’s Hall for a rehearsal of *Falstaff* followed by rehearsals of *The Apostles* and the Cello Concerto at Morley Hall, with further rehearsals the following day. *Falstaff* was played at Queen’s Hall in the evening: ‘F. had splendid reception – & Falstaff went well – also Miss Fairless played [the Violin] Concerto well’.[7]

On 2 September Elgar and Carice travelled by train to Hereford. He rehearsed *The Apostles, Gerontius* and the Cello Concerto, with Beatrice Harrison, on 5 September. On 6 September *Elijah* was performed followed by *The Apostles* on the 7th which Carice found to be ‘perfectly beautiful’ and made a ‘great impression – very good attendance’. Following the performance Elgar ran into Siegfried Sassoon who ‘could think only of the magnificence of *The Apostles* … Could this possibly be the man who composed that glorious work – this smartly dressed ‘military’ – looking grey-haired man, with the carefully trimmed moustache, and curved nose?’. In the evening the Cello Concerto ‘went very well … splendid’. *Gerontius* was performed on 8 September: ‘wonderful – John Coates ill & Phyllis Lett taking it very slow worried father but everyone much impressed as always -’.[8] The Piano Quintet was also performed by Henry G. Ley and the W.H. Reed quartet: ‘beautifully played & wonderful’. Wulstan Atkins concluded ‘It was a glorious festival, and a great and richly deserved success for P.C. Hull’. Reed recalled that Elgar ‘brightened up considerably during the festival week, as he stayed with a very merry party at Brockhampton Court …Walford Davies was there also, and between them they all managed to take him out of himself a little and pierce the gloom which seemed to have settled upon him’.

By 16 September Elgar was back at Severn House which was up for sale: ‘Two people came at lunch to see the house – no good. Hampton’s men came to see over & make notes for catalogue’

5 A photograph of Elgar, Landon Ronald and three others taken outside a country hotel in Sussex reproduced opposite page 194 of *Myself and Others* by Ronald, may have been taken during this visit.

6 Sir Julian Corbett (1854 – 1922) writer on naval history, who lived at Stopham Manor near Brinkwells.

7 Margaret Fairless (1895 – 1968).

8 Phyllis Lett (1884 - 1962) mezzo-soprano.

Carice noted and the next day she and Elgar played 'Billiards after dinner. Made 95 to Father's 100'. The following day they went to the Speyers at Ridgehurst returning to London on 19 September. On 22nd he agreed with Novello to accept 100 guineas for the Bach Fugue orchestration. On the same day *Falstaff* 'went splendidly … saw Bernard Shaw's [sic] were there'. This prompted Shaw to write to Elgar, stating that he found *Falstaff* 'magnificent, and perfectly graphic to anyone who knows his Shakespear … Talk of Till Eulenspiegel or Don Quixote! This ought to be played three times to their once. Composing operas is mere piffle to a man who can do *that.* It is the true way to set drama to music'. Elgar followed this up by sending Shaw a copy of his analysis made in 1913, which enabled him 'to get the themes into my head'. On 23rd Carice went out to find service flats for her father and 'got several orders to view … Notice board fixed to house in evening'. On 27 September Carice recorded: 'Father & I out quite early – looked at flat in St. James's Place which he liked & told Hampton's to communicate with owner – saw several others not nice -'.

The next day they 'Looked at flat again & liked it more – street comes to an end & there is a nice way into park through a narrow passage'. Preparations for leaving Hampstead continued. On 30th Carice noted: 'Tore up a lot of things etc – Father & I out after lunch – did not feel inclined to go far so went to a film – On to Edwards, bookshop to enquire about books to sell'. Elgar sent a lot of old Three Choirs Festival programmes to Ivor Atkins.

On 1 October he and Carice went to see the play *Now & Then* at the Vaudeville theatre: 'Very amusing play – George Graves priceless – enjoyed it'[9] and the next day they caught a bus '& went all the way to Blackheath & got another & came back – Lovely sunset & very nice to see Blackheath. Billiards after dinner'. A meeting on 4 October with Lawrence Maxwell, the President of the Cincinnati May Festival, resulted in an invitation to write a new work for it, but which came to nothing.[10] That evening they saw Eugene O'Neill's play *Diff'rent* at the Hampstead Theatre; Carice found it 'very clever … perfectly acted'. Eugene Goossens came to dinner on 7 October to see the Bach C minor Fugue transcription as he was to conduct the first performance: 'very excited'. Many evenings were spent partly playing billiards, while 'sorting & tearing up' continued. Elgar wrote: 'It is a fearful wrench this moving & clearing up things'. Ernest Newman and his wife came to tea and played billiards on 9 October. Carice noted there was an 'awful fuss over round table' on 14 October when Lady Stuart came.[11] 15 October was Elgar's last day at Severn House and he wrote to Lady Stuart that he felt 'reconciled to the change … not happy but calmer over the situation'. He signed the lease for the flat in St James's Place and went off to The Hut, leaving Carice to finalise the movement of furniture and possessions, ready for him to move in on 20 October. She remained at Severn House which was gradually being emptied.

He wrote to Lady Stuart on 22 October that his new 'sitting room is in bright sunshine now & looks lovely: all other arrangements perfect & all the servants – so far – charming'. On 24 October he conducted his Violin Concerto with Albert Sammons at Queen's Hall.

He reported to Atkins that the flat was 'very comfortable & I am close to three of my clubs – *lonely* of course but I must face that', and Atkins called on Elgar at the flat on 26 October. They both went to Queen's Hall for the rehearsal of the Bach C minor Fugue. Atkins was delighted by the transcription calling it 'magnificent'. Elgar then took him to lunch at the Athenaeum.

The Bach Fugue transcription was premiered on 27 October: 'Went down to Queen's Hall … - met Father - & heard first performance of Bach Fugue – great enthusiasm – had to be repeated & Father called down to platform to bow – Thrilling evening – sounded quite wonderful'. The next day Boult conducted the Second Symphony at the Royal College of Music. Sir Hugh Allen, Frank Schuster, Siegfried Sassoon and Mr and Mrs Speyer were in the audience. Carice thought it was a 'very good performance – allowing for students' orchestra & great enthusiasm. Father had to bow several times from balcony'. On the last day of the month Elgar returned to Severn House '& stayed till 4.30. Went through all sorts of things – very trying sad day -'.

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9 George Graves (c. 1876 – 1949) actor whom Elgar met at the Coliseum during the run of *The Fringes of the Fleet* in 1917.

10 Lawrence Maxwell (1853 – 1927) a Cincinnati lawyer and Solicitor General of the United States from 1893 to 1895.

11 Lady Stuart looked after the round composing table until Carice was able to do so. For years it was on display at the Elgar Birthplace Museum. Sadly, it is now in store.

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