

ALICE – Out of the Shadow.
A life of Alice Elgar, 1848-1920

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I declare that this is all my own work.

Signed

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Wendy H. Hill." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Wendy H.

Hill

ALICE – Out of the Shadow.

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Abstract

This thesis argues for more recognition for the role of women in the creative lives of their husbands or partners. It argues that in the life of the composer, Edward Elgar, his creative genius would not have flowered as it did, without his wife Alice. Her support, encouragement, advocacy and general helpfulness were vital. It could be suggested that she made him work – to keep to deadlines etc., and with her organizing abilities, he achieved greatness. This thesis draws on archival evidence from books, articles and local newspapers and although limited in scope (because of the lack of evidence), it argues for more recognition and acknowledgement for Alice Elgar. This thesis therefore suggests that to fully understand the role of women (not just wives, but also partners, sisters, mothers and daughters of creative men), more research into their role needs to focus on their huge contributions. Historically, Alice was 9 years older than Edward and had the beginnings of her own literary career, before they met. This became subsumed in Edward's career, and Alice saw her life's work as her care of Edward.

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Photographs and Illustrations

All photos and illustrations, listed below, are taken from:
 MOORE Jerrold Northrop, *Elgar - A Life in Photographs*
 (London, Oxford University Press, 1972)

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Please note: the family photographs we have of Alice
 are of variable quality, due to the period of photography.



Fig. 1: Alice Elgar at Severn House, London (age 64). c.1912

Photography by Claud Harris

(from Moore 1972, p.25)

Introduction

The Research Question

To what extent did Alice Elgar, wife of the composer Edward Elgar influence and contribute to his career during their 32 years together?

Methodological Approach

The research question will be answered using printed material, all in the public domain, as well as relevant diaries and letters. An overview of Alice's life and her career as a poet and novelists as well as her activities and involvement (or not) in world and national events will be examined. Throughout this thesis the first names will be used ie. Alice and Edward, although such informality may seem inappropriate at times, the use of first names makes for clarity and saves confusion. Alice was named Caroline Alice, but the use of middle names was common at this time. The thesis will conclude with a narrative of Edward's life after Alice died in 1920.¹

We have photographs of Alice taken with Edward² (see Fig. 3: - page 34 - Mr and Mrs Edward Elgar, on holiday, 1892). Alice was quite small - she always wore her hair in a bun (presumably to give her extra height) and her china-blue eyes are described by various writers (Maine³, Burley⁴, Boulton⁵). She had a rather quiet voice. Boulton describes how "Alice would come up and confide in his tummy".⁶ In this photograph, Alice looks more like Edward's mother than his wife - the age difference of 9 years being very

¹ YOUNG 1978 (p.21)

² MOORE 1972 (p.20)

³ MAINE 1933

⁴ BURLEY

⁵ BOULT

⁶ BOULT (p.70)

noticeable. Alice once remarked that she wished she was better looking "for Edward's sake".⁷

⁷ YOUNG 1978 (p.99)

Brief Biography of Caroline Alice Elgar, née Roberts

Caroline Alice Roberts (usually known as Alice) was born in 1848 in Bhuj, India, where her father was serving in the Indian Army. He rose to be a Major General and was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1858. Alice was the youngest child and the only daughter of the family, having three older brothers, one of whom died in infancy. Alice's mother was Julia Maria Raikes, part of a distinguished Gloucestershire family. Julia's father was Reverend Robert Raikes, who is credited with being the founder of the Sunday School movement.⁸

When Alice was two years old in 1850, the whole family came back to England and settled in Cheltenham, where her two brothers were sent to school. Her father bought Hazeldine House, a large country house in the village of Redmarley D'Abitot (then in Worcestershire, now in Gloucestershire).⁹

There is little information on how Alice was educated (more about this is Chapter 3). Her father died in 1860, when Alice was twelve years old. When she and Edward met, in 1886, Alice was thirty eight years old, living with her widowed mother, as a dutiful spinster daughter.¹⁰ Edward was nine years younger. They were married in 1889, and their only child, Carice Irene, was born in 1891, in London.¹¹ After her birth, they moved back to Malvern to their "home" territory, where Edward's career as a composer began to be established. After a seven-year residence in Hereford, from 1904-1911, they moved to London and his recognition as a great composer continued.

Alice died in in 1920 and is buried in St Wulstan's Roman Catholic Church in Little Malvern, Worcestershire.¹²

⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p.20)

⁹ WARDE (front cover)

¹⁰ YOUNG 1978 (p 90)

¹¹ KENNEDY 1982 (p 47)

¹² MOORE 1984 (p 754)

Literature Review

Research Question

The topic of this research is the life of Caroline Alice Elgar, known as Alice, and her influence and role in the life of Edward Elgar, the composer. This role and influence has so far, been unacknowledged and largely unrecognized. Clear examination will reveal a life, lived by devotion and self-sacrifice, which merits acclamation, and which contributed to the creative life of a musical genius.

This Literature Review is limited in scope due to the scarcity of writings about Alice Elgar. She deserves more acknowledgement and recognition that she has received so far, and what writings do exist, are lacking in important details. An overview of the literature available on middle- and upper-class women's lives has been looked at from the perspective of Alice's interest and involvement and it can be asserted that these large important national movements did not impact on Alice's life. Her life continued in its devotion, care and self-sacrifice.

The purpose of this review is to examine the literature available and relevant to this topic, to analyse the gaps in these works and their strengths and their weaknesses, as well as their limitations. Looking for patterns and themes in the existing literature will lead to ideas for further research as well as gaps in the published knowledge about Alice. The starting point for this research is the only book written about Alice and devoted solely to her.¹³

Alice's only Biography

¹³ YOUNG 1978

The only book devoted to Alice, published in 1978, acknowledges the help given to the author by Edward and Alice's daughter Carice, who died in 1970. It can therefore be assumed that the book contains her memories of her parents and on closer questioning, her mother Alice. We do not know when first contact was made between Percy Young, the author, and Carice. It can be assumed that the details and anecdotes were told to Percy Young over a period of time. He does assert "that the book is largely based on Alice's own words". This is not strictly true unless the author is meaning Alice's poetry and other writings.

This literature review is reliant on the one book, which is limited in its scope. It could be asserted that a fuller picture of Caroline Alice Elgar, née Roberts, is waiting to be written. Instead of using her own poetry and writings, there is much more that needs to be examined and researched, especially her views, opinions, character and personality. She was certainly an important presence in the life and career of her husband Edward but she was also a person in her own right, living the life she had chosen.

The book leaves us speculating about Alice, her refusal to admit to anything vexing or unpleasant, her self-discipline and her idealism that kept her apart from her true feelings. We know that she became socially tedious, gushed about Edward's music, but was savage in her opinion about anyone who hampered him. Her daughter claimed her mother became "bored and boring".¹⁴ Alice was once asked whether she regretted giving up a career as poet and novelist. She is reported to have said "Oh no!, the care of a genius is enough for any woman."¹⁵ Alice deserves a fuller and better book than this single book devoted to her alone. If Alice was such an important figure in the life of one of the great composers, why is so little known about her character, her personality and her "inner life"?

Alice's own Novel

¹⁴ YOUNG 1978 (p 183)

¹⁵ KENNEDY 1978 (p.147)

There is one book, a novel, written by Alice herself. In this book – *Marchcroft Manor*¹⁶ she expresses her own ideas about many topics and issues, by using her hero to expound what may be Alice's own views. This book is not an academic publication, it is a trade publication, but it is a very useful guide to Alice's views on life, marriage and social justice that are not expressed elsewhere. The frontispiece shows C.A Roberts as the author, with no indication of the sex of the author (see Chapter 3: Alice's writings).

Books about Edward Elgar

There is a real industry of literature about Edward Elgar, his life, interests and his music. At the last count, there are 25 biographies of Edward, but not all of them are still in print. In most of them Alice is mentioned as part of Edward's life story - how and where they met, where they married and their subsequent life together. They are all written by male biographers except two.¹⁷ This could be seen as significant. Apart from these biographies, there are many other books about Edward's cycling¹⁸, his golf¹⁹ and his travels in England²⁰ and America²¹ etc. In addition to these specific topics, there are books which discuss Edward and literature²², Edward during the First World War²³ and Edward on record.²⁴

¹⁶ ROBERTS 1882

¹⁷ McVEAGH 1955 and 2007

¹⁸ ALLEN 1997

¹⁹ TOWNSEND and ALLEN (ed) 2004

²⁰ COLLETT 1983

²¹ SMITH (ed) 2004

²² MONK (ed) 1993

²³ FOREMAN (ed) 2001

²⁴ MOORE 1974

There are also many books written specifically devoted to his music *The Enigma Variations*²⁵, *The Sacred Music*²⁶, *The Symphonies*²⁷ among others. A large part of the literature devoted to Edward discuss his technical abilities – his orchestration²⁸ and his use of melody.²⁹

There are 4 biographies written during Edward's life-time, 1911 - (Buckley)³⁰, 1921 (Porte)³¹, 1922 (Newman)³² and 1933 (Maine).³³ Taking each of these biographies in turn, there is no evidence of Edward's co-operation with the first biographer, although he is thanked by Buckley.³⁴ Little is said about Alice except for the basic facts of her life and marriage to Edward, although Buckley surmises that she "fully appreciated her husband's artistic significance."³⁵ This was the first biography to be published in 1911.

The second of these to be published in 1921, by the America critic Porte, makes no mention of his wife, Alice. The third book, in 1922, by English critic and musicologist (Newman), mentions Alice briefly, and does not acknowledge any help from Edward. This third book is a critical study of his music.

However, in 1933, Basil Maine, a friend of Edward, thanks him for the friendship and ready assistance³⁶ and devotes a large part of Chapter X (10) to Alice and her life and

²⁵ TURNER

²⁶ ALLISON

²⁷ KENNEDY 1970

²⁸ DEL MAR

²⁹ HARPER SCOTT

³⁰ BUCKLEY 1911

³¹ PORTE 1921

³² NEWMAN 1922

³³ MAINE 1933

³⁴ BUCKLEY (Intro - p.xi)

³⁵ BUCKLEY (p.25)

³⁶ MAINE (preface)

devotion to Edward. Maine states that “it is no mere coincidence that between 1889, the year Alice and Edward married, and 1920, when Alice died – “his genius burnt with a steady flame.”³⁷ Maine also tells us that Alice admired him and believed in his genius, “giving up literary successes, to help him with his orchestral scoring.”³⁸ Maine also acknowledges Edward and Alice’s growing friendship, from 1886, and their common interests in music and literature. Half a page is devoted to the writer’s interpretation of Edward’s feeling for Alice and his new happiness in life.

Much of this writing about Edward, is relatively old, but still relevant for researchers into Edward’s life. Most of this academic work comes from the discipline of musicology which naturally takes different approaches and asks different questions to the discipline of history and therefore limited in information about Alice.

In the one book entirely devoted to Alice, the author acknowledges very fulsomely, the help given to him by Edward and Alice’s daughter Carice Elgar Blake³⁹ (as she became). According to Young, Carice did indeed begin to write about her mother but only a paragraph of a prologue exists. In this Carice writes of the great devotion and self-sacrifice Alice showed when she married Edward. Carice expresses her admiration of her mother who “coming from an entirely different sphere in life, shows her faith in his genius, which was entirely justified.”⁴⁰ Carice was alluding to how the class difference between Edward and Alice, as well as their different religious backgrounds. These important details of their lives are explored in 2 articles ⁴¹ and ⁴², and the book devoted to Alice. In this book,⁴³ while attempting to fill the gap in the canon of Elgarian literature, leaves out many aspects of Alice’s life which would add to admiration, or otherwise of her.

³⁷ MAINE (p.216)

³⁸ MAINE (p.7)

³⁹ YOUNG 1978 (p.13)

⁴⁰ YOUNG 1978 (p.14)

⁴¹ HODGKINS (Article)

⁴² McVEAGH 1984 (Article)

⁴³ YOUNG 1978

In the British Library, there is an Archive containing nearly a thousand items about Edward and seventy items about Alice. It is this 'bundle of papers' that Young relied on for his biographical book about Alice. In Young's book, the author was thanked by their daughter Carice, "for doing for Mother what you have done for Father."⁴⁴ Young tells us that Alice deserves to be recognized as an important person in Edward's creative life.

The first part of the book is taken up with an extensive look at Alice's family history and is an interesting historical read. There are numerous details of the many relatives, who married who and their lives. These details given us a good idea of the importance of class, religion and the army had in Alice's life in the 1889s. Alice born into an upper class, Anglican, army family would have been expected to marry within her class and her religion. The author tells us of Alice's daily life, her pastimes and interests and of her eventual interests in culture and music – leading to her first taking piano lessons from Edward in 1886, when she was thirty eight – he was twenty nine. This book contains a great deal of Alice's poetry and lyrics, the author clearly feeling that these deserve space in his book.

⁴⁴ YOUNG 1973

Alice's own Published Novel

Young is of the opinion that Alice's novel, *Marchcroft Manor*, published four years before Alice and Edward met, gives us a view on Alice's opinions of relationships between men and women. In a political context, the novel perhaps echoes Alice's feeling for social justice. If this is so, it gives us some insight into Alice's political views and her growing awareness of the upheavals around her, such as the growing clamour for women's access to her education and Women's Suffrage.

Women at this time in the 1880s did not enjoy infinite possibilities. Historical records give priority to men's lives, but we do have first person narratives, such as letters, diaries and memoirs written by women. Unfortunately, Alice's diaries provide us with little insight into the huge political and social events going on in the years between 1886 and her death in 1920. At this time, Edward and Alice were fairly middle to upper class.⁴⁵ When Alice married Edward she married out of her class, generally rare in those days. As a jobbing musician, Edward moved into the middle class when they lived initially on her small private income."⁴⁶ Women of the middle class, were subject to "a cloak of domesticity"⁴⁷, which resulted in a growth of philanthropy, acting as "guardians of the poor", providing assistance which in turn secured their status.

During this time, 19th century feminists were fighting for further and higher education to enable them to practice medicine, become teachers, lawyers etc. The demands for Suffrage and education were inextricably linked in this struggle.⁴⁸ Alice makes no mention whatsoever in her diaries. It leads one to conclude that these events did not impinge on her life in spite of the massive influence on women's lives.

⁴⁵ MOORE 1984 (p.116)

⁴⁶ YOUNG 1978 (p.111)

⁴⁷ STEINBACH (p.44)

⁴⁸ WILLIAM (Intro)

According to Kathryn Gleadle⁴⁹, between 1860 and 1900, (when Alice was growing up), there were advances in women's employment. Feminist campaigners were making women's paid employment more acceptable. This was not relevant to upper class women who had no need to earn money. Women were making their mark in other ways and freed from domestic toil, upper class women had energy and time to devote themselves to good works and philanthropy.

Young also points out that Alice, being a published poet and novelist before she met Edward, had more in print at this time than he did. Edward, a jobbing musician, making a precarious living in the musical world of Worcester and Malvern must have seemed a world away from Alice's life of comfort, privilege and security.

The relationship between Edward and Alice is scarcely explored, Young does mention the two books ⁵⁰ and ⁵¹ written by two women friends of both Alice and Edward (more later). He makes various interesting assertions however, such as "Edward's moods need to be understood and mostly they were (not always by Alice)."⁵² This sentence raises more questions- not answered by the author. He does not examine their religious differences. Alice agreed to bring up any children of the marriage in the Roman Catholic faith, and she converted to Catholicism in 1893. Meanwhile, Edward began losing his Catholic faith in the aftermath of the disastrous reception of *The Dream of Gerontius*, and although attended church with Alice, claimed to have no religious feelings.⁵³

Young also suggests that "Alice could not face the brave new world of 1920, so she gradually took herself away from it."⁵⁴ He may be suggesting that she wished herself to death. Again, one is left wondering whatever did he mean by this, and where is his

⁴⁹ GLEADLE (Article)

⁵⁰ POWELL

⁵¹ BURLEY and CARRUTHERS 1978

⁵² YOUNG 1978 (p.100)

⁵³ HODGKINS – ARTICLE

⁵⁴ YOUNG 1978 (p.183)

evidence. This slim book is a disappointment in many ways, and needs to be read in conjunction with a more detailed authoritative biography of Edward such as Moore.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ MOORE 1984

Other Writings about Alice

There are two books written by two women friends of both Alice and Edward. These are by Powell⁵⁶ (originally published in 1947) and Burley (1978).⁵⁷ The earlier of these to be published in 1947, was written by their young friend Dorabella (Dora Penny – Variation 10 in *The Enigma Variations*), who was born in 1874, twenty six years after Alice. She became a ‘sisterly’ companion to Alice. However, the book, in its second edition (1994), corrects certain inaccuracies in dates from the first edition, as an appendix.⁵⁸ The book does give us a picture of the life of Alice as she lived with Edward. The book is largely about Edward and Dorabella’s friendship with him – the cycle rides all around the Herefordshire and Worcestershire countryside. It tells us of Alice’s fussiness as well as her devotion.⁵⁹ Dorabella was at Alice’s side during the composition of some of Edward’s great music during the years 1904-1911.⁶⁰ She took her cue from Alice, who by this time, had learned how to cope with Edward’s moods of elation and depression. She (Dorabella) tells us of Alice’s increasing enthusiasm for their work partnership and love for her genius husband.⁶¹

The second publication of interest to Elgarians is the book⁶² written by Rosa Burley, the woman who was the headmistress of the boarding school in Malvern, where Alice and Edward eventually sent Carice to be educated. This friendship was nourished by a mutual admiration for the German language. Rosa describes Alice as “belonging to an earlier generation”.⁶³ Rosa points out that Alice had firm views about her place in society and had convictions of the paramount importance of caste. Rosa also asserts that Alice’s scale of values made her unable to understand any point of view of any social

⁵⁶ POWELL 1947

⁵⁷ BURLEY 1978

⁵⁸ POWELL 1994 (2nd Edition) Appendix B by MOORE (p.153)

⁵⁹ POWELL 1978 (p.168)

⁶⁰ MOORE 1984 (p.198)

⁶¹ POWELL (p.148)

⁶² BURLEY

⁶³ BURLEY (p.58)

class lower than her own.⁶⁴ She also makes the significant point that the “harmonizing of the two very different backgrounds of Alice and Elgar was to have a profound effect on his development as an artist.”⁶⁵

According to Rosa Burley, Alice had an excessive concern for etiquette, such as calling and leaving cards and dressing for dinner.⁶⁶ Rosa asserts that although Alice appreciated music and literature in themselves “she did not underate their social value as subjects for discussion.”⁶⁷ She tells us of Alice’s vagueness in regard to practical affairs and the curious hesitancy of her speech.⁶⁸ On Rosa’s very first meeting, she senses a disparity between Edward and Alice. Alice being wholly typical of the class to which she belonged. Rosa Burley does not acknowledge any of Alice’s cultural achievements calling them “rather indeterminate artistic pursuits”.⁶⁹ This book, although written in 1948, was not published until 1972 – four years after Carice’s death in 1968. (Speculation exists about the reason for the delay in publication). It is interesting in giving us an insight into Edward and Alice’s early married life and their relationship, and serves to give us an insider’s view of Alice’s personality and a little about the way she “presented”.

These three books: Young, Powell and Burley, whilst giving us fleeting glimpses of Alice, do not consider the importance of ‘class’ as a historical category and the importance of class in the lives of women at this time. Historians tended to focus on women at the forefront of public life. These women left letters to newspapers, reports of various committees etc. and their lives can be investigated and examined. There is no evidence that Alice did any of these things. In fact, she could be thought of an “ordinary woman.”⁷⁰ She certainly conformed to what was expected of her (by her upbringing and

⁶⁴ BURLEY (p.60-61)

⁶⁵ BURLEY (p.57)

⁶⁶ BURLEY (p.58)

⁶⁷ BURLEY (p.61)

⁶⁸ BURLEY (p.60)

⁶⁹ BURLEY (p.60)

⁷⁰ LANGHAMMER (Article)

education)⁷¹ and it seems her lack of ambition and aspirations, is apparent once she met Edward.

Women's lives in the period of 1848 to 1920 are not commented on in the three books, and do not acknowledge Alice's contribution to Edward's career, in any way. The book by Percy Young is indebted to the input provided by Carice and is therefore largely uncritical. The author claims to be "redressing the balance", but the picture of Alice he presents does not explore important aspects of Alice's life. The book contains a list of all her writings, and many of her poems are included in the text (see Chapter 3.)

Other Literary references to Alice and her place in Society

Claire Langhammer⁷² argues that ordinariness had its own range of styles, values and behaviours that give meaning to the claim to be ordinary, arguing that ordinariness itself has become a social category, making for complications in understanding the "meritocratic" movement. It can be concluded that within her social class, Alice was ordinary. Devoting herself to Edward and making him her priority, her life looks like one of huge self-sacrifice. It could be asserted that Alice left her upper class life when she married Edward she moved into the middle class and eventually returned to the upper class. There was a short interlude of precarious financial arrangements when she and Edward were first married, living on her private income. She and Edward always had servants, quite a normal situation for families of their class. Lives of middle-class women before the First World War, in the early years of the 20th century give us a picture of a leisured existence bounded by protocols and etiquettes that became important in the lives of these women.

Before Suffrage, opportunities for further and higher education for women were almost non-existent. We have no knowledge of any formal education of Alice, but we can conclude that she had a personality and character than enjoyed learning and she

⁷¹ LEVINE (Ch.6)

⁷² LANGHAMMER (Article)

became a voracious reader.⁷³ She could speak four modern languages and was aware of good literature, displayed by her use of chapter headings in her novel.⁷⁴ Her life of privilege and society allowed her to devote her time and energy to cultural pursuits. There is no evidence that she had a wish to pursue any formal education. It is hard to find evidence of Alice's interest and involvement in happenings outside the home. Either she found enough occupation in her domestic duties or she spent her time pursuing her own cultural interests. Again, there is no way of knowing these things from her diaries and letters.

Looking back, some women of the 19th and early 20th century were truly remarkable, both for the restrictions within which they lived their lives, but also for all they achieved in spite of them.⁷⁵ Women such as Stella, Marchioness of Reading (1894-1971) was born into a privileged wealthy family. Her creation and leadership of the Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence became the W.V.S (latterly the Royal W.V.S). She served as a governor of the BBC and became its Vice Chairman.⁷⁶ One woman whose life had an enormous lasting effect was Lucy Countess of Bewdley (1869-1945). An early advocate of votes for women, she had a particular concern for the lives of girls and women. She headed a national campaign for the provision of anesthesia for childbirth. She married the politician Stanley Baldwin and heavily supported his political career.⁷⁷

Comparing Alice with women of her age and class who achieved great things on the national stage could show Alice in a poor light. Considering Alice's privileged background and seemingly comfortable lifestyle, it could be argued that she lived a narrow life – a life prescribed for her by societal norms. On the other hand, her life of devotion to a creative artist, to enable great music to be written needs acknowledgment and recognition in its own right.

⁷³ YOUNG 1978 (p.38)

⁷⁴ ROBERTS (Chapter headings)

⁷⁵ WILLIAMS (Intro.)

⁷⁶ WILLIAMS (p.156)

⁷⁷ WILLIAMS (p.39)

Women of the middle class were subject to a “cloak of domesticity”,⁷⁸ which resulted in a growth of philanthropy – acting as “guardians of the poor” providing material assistance, which secured their status. This is certainly true of Alice and her mother in the years of Alice growing up in the rural village environment.⁷⁹

There are letters from Alice and Edward to friends and relatives. They were prolific letter writers.⁸⁰ These letters discussing Edward’s business affairs, concert arrangements, as well as the diaries⁸¹ of Alice and Edward, add to the picture of Alice’s contribution to Edward’s creative life. Unfortunately, they do not provide us with insights into Alice’s feelings at the time. The diaries particularly give a great deal of information; of which taxi firm was used, the weather and other domestic details.

It could be suggested that Alice became complacent and even lazy. Her fleeting interest and non-involvement in national events is glaringly obvious and confirms a view of Alice’s acceptance of the ‘status quo’ – and her having no wish to change. Historians of women’s lives of the late 19th and 20th Century have proposed theories that can be applied to Alice.⁸² Philippa Levine asserts that at this time “biology was seen as a central in determining the social roles of men and women”. She suggests that a division of labour men earning, women at home, became the norm at this time. Certainly, Alice conformed to this idea. Kathryn Gleadle⁸³ express a widespread belief that “middle-class family life and marriage constituted not only the affection and bodily needs of women, and that this provided a springboard for their contribution to Victorian culture”. In other words, a middle-class family life was the way women could begin to develop talents in the cultural sphere. Alice, while a single woman had preempted this assertion by the self-publishing of her poetry and her novel.

⁷⁸ YEO 1999 (Article)

⁷⁹ WARDE (Preface)

⁸⁰ ELGAR - 6 Volumes of letters (see Bibliography)

⁸¹ ELGAR - 5 Volumes of Diaries (see bibliography)

⁸² LEVINE (p.129)

⁸³ GLEADLE (chap 12. ongoing)

On the other hand, Alice conformed to the norm but, she did continue to write after their marriage. However, there is no evidence of her wishing to have it published under her married name.

Alice's conformity is easily understood, considering her seeming disinterest in world and national events. Another view, expressed by Carol Dyhouse⁸⁴ asserts that girls' secondary schools of the late 19th Century did aim to encourage girls to think about the prospects of earning their own living as preferable to marriage, for marriage's sake, or marriage as a meal-ticket. The book, *The Incorporated Wife*⁸⁵ by Callan and Ardener propounds the theory of wives who become subsumed into the life of their husband's and conform to what is expected of them in that life, neglecting any role they may have had before the marriage. They assert that 'Incorporated wives' undergo a silencing and under-recognition of their personhood. They describe the lives of wives of Oxford Academics, wives of policemen, wives of diplomats and wives of settlers in countries overseas. The conclusion that these women take on a certain role is well illustrated and it can be seen that Alice did exactly this - becoming Elgar's wife (and later Lady Elgar).

There is no evidence to show that Alice discussed with Edward, before their marriage, whether her writing career would continue, which suggests that the lukewarm reception her novel had received convinced Alice that her writing had no future.

We have diaries,⁸⁶ written jointly by Edward and Alice, when on various holidays, their many references to their cultural pursuits are noted. While making interesting reading, they give no indication of any emotional responses. Considering her past experience as a novelist, where she gave her characters emotions and feelings, it is hard to see anything of Alice's inner life in these diaries. Women of Alice's class, in the early years of the 20th century would have witnessed the beginnings of a feminist movement together with growing demands for Women's Suffrage.⁸⁷ However, this was not universally welcomed

⁸⁴ DYHOUSE (p.55)

⁸⁵ CALLEN and ARDENER (Intro.)

⁸⁶ DIARIES ed BIRD and CHENNEL (see bibliography)

⁸⁷ BEAUMONT (Article) ed. by Ina ZWEINIGER-BARGIELOWSKA (Ch.17)

among the middle and upper classes of women. Among the anti-suffrage movement were women opposed to any disruption of the “status quo”, suggesting a certain complacency. Alice may have been amongst this group of women. Her pre-occupation with Edward, his health, his moods and his growing fame may have taken all her time. In 1900, Alice was 52 and may have felt the age difference between herself and Edward and it is easy to see how she justified her existence as fulfilling the role of rescuer.

Conclusion

This literature review is heavily reliant on the one book written about Alice (Young 1978) and 8 books about Edward (Young x 1, Kennedy x 3 and Moore x 4) . In total there are 25 biographies about Edward, as well as other writings concerning women of her social class and position. There are also Alice’s own writings which give us a glimpse of her character and personality but there are still many unanswered questions. Alice’s life with Edward was not unique. Many wives, partners and husbands of creative people may have had to subsume their own creative urges to “serve” their spouses. More research about Alice could include more about her life, their background and religious differences, as well her specific role and contribution to Edward Elgar’s output as a composer.

Alice’s life is unusual in that she had a creative life of her own making before she met Edward, and although we know her one novel was not well reviewed, there is no evidence of her thinking of writing a second novel. By marrying Edward, she conformed to the societal norms that existed seeming to “fall into”, which was expect of her. Much feminist literature examines the role of the wife. Alice’s situation, however, is worth examination because it is acknowledged that she performed more than wifely duties, her legacy is not her own cultural work but that of her husband of thirty one years, Edward Elgar. Alice deserves more recognition as a person in her own right, for taking the courageous decision to marry Edward and the ways she established herself as a massively important person in English Musical life.



Fig. 2: Alice Roberts in 1885 (age 37) before she met Edward c.1885

Photography by Schemboche (from Moore 1972, p.19)

Chapter 1:

Alice's Life before she met Edward Elgar

Introduction:

Alice Elgar's life deserves closer attention than she has so far gained; and this chapter will examine her life before she met her famous husband, Edward Elgar.

However, it is important to acknowledge that there are no letters or diaries of Alice Roberts (as she then was) to be consulted. There is only one book devoted to Alice⁸⁸ - while there are 25 biographies of her husband, as well as a large body of literature devoted to his music,⁸⁹ his cycling,⁹⁰ golf,⁹¹ travels⁹² and other aspects of his life.⁹³

This book is largely written by its author after extensive interviews with the daughter of Edward and Alice, Carice Elgar Blake, after the death of her father in 1934. There are also many myths that have arisen, over the years, about Alice and her life. Among Elgarians many of these myths have become established facts, although there is no evidence for most of them (Further discussion will follow). Finding sources for these issues has been difficult, and although for parts of her life after marriage, there are extensive letters and diaries – these do not exist for her childhood and early adulthood.

It is pertinent to point out that books on Elgar written after 1978 (publication of Young's book) have perpetuated these myths and despite extensive research it has proved impossible to find the source of these myths. Of course, they add to the "mystery" of Alice's life, but it must be remembered that while Young acknowledges the fact that his

⁸⁸ YOUNG 1978

⁸⁹ KENNEDY 1970

⁹⁰ ALLEN 1997

⁹¹ TOWNSEND (ed Allen) 2004

⁹² COLLETT 1993

⁹³ MONK 1990 and 1993

book is based on conversations with Carice Elgar Blake, there are few references to substantiate a great deal of what he wrote.

Early Years

Caroline Alice Roberts was born in 1848, in India, where her father, Major General Sir Henry Gee Roberts was serving in the Indian Army. However, Alice did not have an Anglo-Indian upbringing, as the whole family, Alice and her two older brothers and her parents came to England in 1850, when Alice was two years old. On this visit to England, her father purchased Hazeldine House in the village of Redmarley D'Abitot on the borders of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire.⁹⁴ Alice's brothers were sent to school in Cheltenham where the family kept a "pied de terre", when Alice's father returned to India.

Young quotes a remark from a cousin of Alice's, Vera Raikes, said by a servant called Rundle who became a very important and much respected maid, devoted to all the Roberts' children. Rundle said, according to Vera Raikes, that "Alice was gentle and good to a degree but had a bad and fearful disposition."⁹⁵

Alice's family background is of great interest. The three establishments, army, church and law had a huge influence on her childhood. The family were wealthy and well established in Gloucestershire. Alice's maternal grandfather – Reverend Robert Raikes is credited with being the founder of the Sunday School movement,⁹⁶ originally, providing literacy lessons for parishioners.

Alice's father, knighted by Queen Victoria "for services in India" in 1858,⁹⁷ finally returned to England and sadly died in 1860 when Alice was 12 years old. She was left a large amount of money in his will, as well as the future inheritance of Hazeldine House,

⁹⁴ WARDE 2007 (cover)

⁹⁵ YOUNG 1978 (p.38)

⁹⁶ YOUNG 1978 (p 20)

⁹⁷ YOUNG 1978 (p 25)

and was also due to inherit money from three maiden aunts and from her mother when she died.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p 95)

Alice's Education

When Alice's brothers were home from their boarding school in Cheltenham, she learnt how to bowl and bat when they required cricket practice⁹⁹ and Alice learned how to ride a horse. Young tells us that Alice was a lively curious and at times an obstreperous child. She observed her environment in detail, leading to a life-long interest in wildlife, especially birds. According to Young, like her father, she had an affection for and understanding of animals, especially Persian cats and horses.¹⁰⁰

Alice's education has always been thought to have been provided by governesses but there is no evidence for this. No mention of them in any literature or census record exists, although a maiden aunt - Elizabeth Roberts, is recorded as a resident at Hazeldine House according to the 1851 census, when Alice was thirteen years old. The word governess, however, is not recorded. It is known that her mother became a founder member of the London Library "Alice became a voracious reader."¹⁰¹ Being an upper middle-class family, Alice would not have had to be involved in any domestic matters, unlike girls in working class families.¹⁰² There are no records of Alice having received any formal education in the local village school.¹⁰³ It seems Alice, was a curious and energetic child¹⁰⁴ and if largely self-educated – it is an admirable characteristic to note. She had a facility for modern languages and eventually became fluent in German, Italian, French and Spanish. Her grasp of these, especially German and Italian was so good that she made various translations of pieces and later used her skills when on various holidays with Edward.¹⁰⁵ Her upbringing can be seen as typical of many young women and girls of the upper and middle class, of the late 19th Century.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ YOUNG 1978 (p.37)

¹⁰⁰ YOUNG 1978 (p.40)

¹⁰¹ YOUNG 1978 (p.37))

¹⁰² LEVINE 1994 (p83)

¹⁰³ WARDE (p.143)

¹⁰⁴ YOUNG 1978 (p.40)

¹⁰⁵ WARDE (p.147)

¹⁰⁶ DYHOUSE 1989 (p.9)

Her vein of curiosity and her inventive urges can be as complimentary characteristics to Edward. In her teens, she designed a revolving summer house, which was duly built by the village carpenter in the extensive grounds of Hazeldine House. She had read about Aeolian Harps and had one set up especially.¹⁰⁷ We know Alice and her mother were voracious readers, and there is no evidence of Alice receiving any formal education, it can be assumed that her knowledge came from reading widely and deeply. She had a facility for modern languages and had some skill in music. It can be seen from the foregoing that Alice liked acquiring knowledge, wherever she could find it, and it would be really interesting to know whether “she accepted her lot” and came to realise that her self-reliance was her way of life. There were certain societal norms that an unmarried girl had to learn about social etiquette, and her mother would have instructed Alice into these. It is not known whether Alice conformed to these social niceties willingly or not, she may have accepted her prescribed role in life, especially during the years of her adolescence.

The flowering of Alice’s literary and creative talents came in 1872/1873 when she was 24/25 years of age. This was not a poem but a Geological essay called “*Worlds from my Window*”. We can assume that Alice was an organised and methodical sort of person. Being interested in geology, she was asked to produce an index for a book being written by the father of one of her friends. The last word in the Preface is reserved for “Miss Roberts of Hazeldine, Redmarley, for efficient aid in carrying the MSS (manuscript) through the press, and for the copious index.”¹⁰⁸

Her work on the essay shows imagination and describes a beautiful world. There are changes in structure she says that one should look on it “with a sense of its enchantment.” Alice makes it clear that responsibility for the nature of the world was with God. Brought up in the Church of England, it is clear that Alice had faith, and she conformed to what was expected of her.

¹⁰⁷ YOUNG 1978 (p.40)

¹⁰⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p.59)

Young asserts that Alice was deferential to the past, like many of her generation. She definitely had aspirations of becoming a creative person, but after the rather lukewarm reception of her long poem *Isabel Trevithoe* 1872¹⁰⁹ and then her novel in 1882, *Marchcroft Manor*¹¹⁰, she seemed to have shelved any ambition in that field. She resigned herself to poetry and short story writing. Young asserts that she wrote with amicability and a mechanical competence.¹¹¹ (see Fig 1. - page 24 - Photo of Alice (age 37) a year before she met Edward).¹¹²

It can be assumed that Alice lived with a tension born of a wish for some sort of independence, which was being shown publicly by a number of women of her own privileged class. A sense of duty must have permeated her thoughts inculcated by being part of a military family and the widowhood of her mother (her mother endured 27 years of widowhood 1860-1887). Alice's life was certainly less exciting than she may have hoped but there was a guarantee of lasting comfort and long-term security. When she met Edward in 1886, she probably saw Edward as just another person in her life who she could learn from and enhance her skills

What Edward thought of her, on first meetings, is not known, he being nine years younger than her. Furthermore, it is also not known when the decision to marry came about. It could be asserted that in Alice, Edward saw a motherly caring woman, who showed a great interest in him and his life. He would have learned of her cultural aspirations, and although Alice was never an activist, she saw that changes in Society were imminent and necessary. She attributes both her male characters in her one novel of 1882, as having dominant interests and radical viewpoints (discussed further in Chapter 3).

There is a viewpoint that as a general rule, most first novels have an element of autobiography in them. Therefore, Alice's thoughts about her novel's characters and

¹⁰⁹ ROBERTS 1872

¹¹⁰ ROBERTS 1882

¹¹¹ YOUNG 1978 (p.64)

¹¹² MOORE 1972 (p.25)

what qualities she ascribed to them makes for insight into her own character. In this novel, where a gentleman, Julian Tressany, unexpectedly inherits a country estate, Alice is able to express views that perhaps she held in private, but never expressed publicly. It is not known if she shared these thoughts with her friends and family. The fact remains however, that the political content of *Marchcroft Manor* is far removed from what a women of Alice's class would agree to. In her book, Alice's hero, Julian, has a friend called Roger, who unlike Julian expresses interests in cultural pursuits. One could surmise that Alice, while feeling deprived of a life that could utilise her views and talents, felt the only way to express her feelings was to put these words in the mouths of her fictional characters.¹¹³

One aspect of Alice's character that is worth expressing, is her caring attitude towards people. She was involved with village life, together with her mother, and must have witnessed deprivation among the villagers. One could speculate that she saw in Edward someone she could "rescue". Her mother died in 1887, so when they were married in 1888, she was a mature spinster, answerable to no-one, and able to make her own decisions. She met Edward, a poor jobbing musician, literally scraping a living, listening to children trying to play the violin, for eight hours a day. This must have been a real trial for someone with a sensitive ear. No wonder, he was not considered a good teacher, providing little encouragement or jokes or praise.¹¹⁴

Alice may have realised that her financial situation was such that they could live on her private income and on the proceeds of the sale of Hazeldine House. Even at this early stage in the relationship it seems Alice had faith that Edward would be soon earning not just enough to live on, but to give him the recognition she felt he deserved.

It could be asserted that from her early adulthood, Alice "fell in" to being a companion to her mother. Together they have left a record of good works around the village. They did 'parish visiting' around the area and attended events such as the Village Flower Show.

¹¹³ ROBERTS 1882

¹¹⁴ BURLEY 1978 (p. 25)

She also sang in the Church Choir and taught in the Sunday School.¹¹⁵ We know she had friendships with girls of her own age and together they were able to pursue artistic interests, such as music. One such friend, Hyacinth Symonds was the daughter of Rev. W. S. Symonds (author of the book *Record of the Rocks* for which Alice provided the index). Alice and Hyacinth played duets at local concerts.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ WARDE (p.13)

¹¹⁶ YOUNG 1978 (p.46)

Victorian Feminism and its Effect on Alice

At this time women and girls were part of a phenomenon called by Eileen Yeo “Social Motherhood”.¹¹⁷ This is the idea that women of the middle and upper classes took on the role of the mothering of the lower classes, offering advice, helping with caring for the young children and offering motherly advice (a forerunner of the Health Visitor). It could be seen that Alice was conforming to what was expected of her. The first 20 years of her life (1848-1868) can be viewed as one of comfort, with no formal responsibilities, no shortage of money and no reason to disturb the status quo. Alice’s upbringing and informal education did not prepare her for a world of work¹¹⁸ and we assume that she accepted her future role in life would be to remain within her class. It is not known whether she had any romantic attachments of any sort, as no evidence survives.

The Cultural Life of Alice

As far as is known, Alice’s mother was not an invalid, not needing Alice’s care, therefore leaving Alice free to indulge growing interests in culture. She was lucky in many ways. She was able to travel in her own carriage to the many events in Malvern and Worcester where there was a wealth of musical performances, clubs, societies as well as amateur orchestras, choirs and glee clubs. She also had all the leisure time needed to indulge her interests, which as well as music, involved with visits to art galleries, both local and in London. She took up painting in water colours and continued this after her marriage. (A water colour of Edward and Alice’s drawing room is printed in Young’s book.¹¹⁹ She began using her own creative writing talents at this time (see Chapter 3).

Alice’s adult interests were not confined to music and art. Young tells us of her interest in wildlife and certainly the grounds in which Hazeldine House stands has many mature trees and interesting features (as per my own personal observations).¹²⁰ There were

¹¹⁷ YEO 1999 (Article)

¹¹⁸ GLEADLE 2001 (Article)

¹¹⁹ YOUNG 1978 (p.145)

¹²⁰ My Visit to Phera Hall (formerly Hazeldine House) 2023

several naturalist clubs and societies in the area who attracted many eminent speakers. This interest in nature stayed with Alice all her life and brought her great joy, particularly in birds. As for her interest in music, it is known that her brother Frederick had a good tenor voice and Alice accompanied him on the piano at occasional concerts.¹²¹

To improve her piano skills, she went on holiday to Brussels and while there took piano lessons from Ferdinand Kufferath and later harmony lessons from the organist of Gloucester Cathedral Charles Harford Lloyd¹²². Her interest in music, culminated in her deciding to take piano lessons from a talked-about musician who, at this time, had installed himself in a rented studio space in Malvern and advertised his services in the Malvern Gazette.¹²³

It can be seen from Alice's history at this time, a tension coming from a wish for some sort of independence which was showing itself publicly in a number of women of her own privileged class.¹²⁴ On the other hand, Alice's sense of duty towards her widowed mother and a guarantee of long-term security as the spinster daughter of a wealthy family may have weighed heavily in Alice's mind.

Other Influences

There were wider influences to consider. It is unknown whether Alice was aware, at this time, of the stirrings of "feminism" and the expressions of the feminists of the day in important matter such as education for girls to prepare them for a world of work.¹²⁵

It is a matter of speculation whether Alice's wish for self-improvement stemmed from her natural curiosity or another motive. The fact remains that she eventually saw in

¹²¹ WARDE (p.144)

¹²² MOORE 1984 (p.115)

¹²³ Malvern Gazette (mid 1880s)

¹²⁴ LEVINE (p.83)

¹²⁵ STEINBACH (intro.)

Edward Elgar a person who was in sympathy with her ideas about culture and learning. Edward was largely self-taught in musical theory, harmony, counterpoint etc. Did Alice see Edward as a person she could “rescue” from his current existence, as a jobbing musician?

Another similarity between Alice and Edward can be seen in the manner which they acquired their respective skills. Edward, largely self-educated in music, with access to books, scores and libretti in his father’s music shop and Alice with access to good literature and culture as well as a natural curiosity and facility for languages. It seems that they both had a urge for self-improvement.

Alice’s Romantic Life

It is not known whether she had any romantic attachments, but no evidence survives. However, writers such as Eileen Yeo¹²⁶ is of the view that, at this time, women were taking their caring duties into the public sphere – in a spirit of helpfulness. Alice may well have been aware of what was expected of a woman of her age and class.¹²⁷ It is not known whether Alice was actively looking for a different role in life when she arranged to take piano lessons from Edward Elgar. She actually applied for lessons in piano accompaniment.

A diary note by Edward survives from 1886:

“Miss Roberts 1st lesson Oct 6”.¹²⁸

Thus began a new life for them both.

¹²⁶ YEO 1992 (Article)

¹²⁷ HOLLOWAY and BARCLAY (Article)

¹²⁸ MOORE 1984 (p.115)



Fig. 3: Mr and Mrs Edward Elgar, on holiday in Garmisch, 1892

Photograph B. Johannes (from Moore 1972, p.20)

Chapter 2

Alice and Edward Elgar's marriage and early married life

Introduction

This chapter will show how Alice began to make her influence on Edward a reality. She was in receipt of her small private income as well as her inheritance after her mother's death in 1887 and was therefore able to make financial decisions for them both. Her determination that Edward had talents that should be recognized resulted in the decision to settle in London after the marriage. The decision to honeymoon on the Isle of Wight (where Queen Victoria had established Osborne House) can be seen as Alice's awareness of what was fashionable at the time and her wish for both of them to be "Society People."

Alice's influence on Edward's professional and personal life began in the early years of their marriage and as can be seen, continued for the next 30 years.

Alice's Situation

Alice's life before she met Edward Elgar in 1886, when she was thirty eight years old, was one of a spinster, living with her widowed mother in a large country house, in a rural village (see Introduction page 9). She was a self-published poet and novelist and a woman of many cultural interests¹²⁹. She was also engaged in charitable works around the village teaching in the Sunday School, singing in the church choir, and undertaking tasks expected of a woman of her class and position.¹³⁰.

¹²⁹ MOORE 1984 (p.115)

¹³⁰ YOUNG 1978 (p.41)

Her prospects for marriage, at this time, were quite low. A woman of 38, rather plain and with a history of intellectual pursuits was not following the usual pattern of marriageability.¹³¹ It is known that she had inherited money from her father who had died twenty six years earlier, but it is not known whether she had accrued any money from her own writings. When they met, she had more in print than Edward. She was due to inherit the grand country house and money from 3 maiden aunts, who having no issue of their own, and Alice having no husband to support her, left her their money in their wills¹³².

At this time, Alice was conforming to what was expected of a woman approaching middle age, living at home, in some comfort, with her widowed mother¹³³. We have no evidence of any romantic attachments at all, and we can assume that Alice “did her duty” as far as society was concerned, being the spinster daughter in a family of the upper class, her father having been knighted by Queen Victoria, in 1858, for his services in the Army¹³⁴.

There are no surviving diaries of Alice’s before 1890 when she and Edward began keeping a joint diary. These diaries give us insights into their domestic life, with details of appointments, visitors, taxi firms used and other household details, but do not tell us of any emotions, vexations, or opinions.¹³⁵

Alice’s early Creative Life

Among Alice’s cultural pursuits, was piano playing, as well as musical theory. Apart from playing duets with her friend Hyacinth Symonds at local village concerts,¹³⁶ she

¹³¹ WARDE (p.146)

¹³² YOUNG 1978 (p.95)

¹³³ YOUNG 1978 (p.95)

¹³⁴ KENNEDY 1982 (p.41)

¹³⁵ Authors own observations

¹³⁶ WARDE (p.114)

accompanied her brother Frederick, who had a fine tenor voice¹³⁷. She had taken piano lessons from a famous Professor of Music at Brussels University, Ferdinand Kufferath¹³⁸ and had had lessons in harmony from the organist of Gloucester Cathedral¹³⁹ Charles Harford Lloyd. In 1886, Alice heard about “an up-and-coming” musician called Edward Elgar, who having set up as a teacher with a rented studio in Malvern, advertised in the Malvern Gazette. Alice began lessons in accompaniment – wishing to improve her skills¹⁴⁰. Alice travelled in her own phaeton, with her own coachman, who remarked, after 6 months of lessons, “There is more to it than the music”. This is anecdotal evidence and relies on a letter written many years later.¹⁴¹

In 1886, when Alice and Edward met, he was a struggling jobbing musician, the son of a shop keeper. He had had some success in musical circles, conducting choirs, organizing rehearsals, playing the violin in various orchestras, but his real ambition was to compose. The name Elgar became well respected in Worcester and Malvern for reliability and good musicianship.¹⁴² Coming from a Catholic family with his father organist at St George’s Catholic Church in Worcester, Edward’s family background class and religion was strikingly different to Alice.

Barriers to the Marriage

The class difference was extremely important at this time in English Society. One’s class determined such things as education and marriage¹⁴³. In deciding to marry outside their respective classes, Alice and Edward were disturbing the status quo – what was expected by society. It was this difference in class that most worried Edward’s

¹³⁷ WARDE (p.114)

¹³⁸ MOORE 1984 (p.115)

¹³⁹ MOORE 1984 (p.115)

¹⁴⁰ KENNEDY 1987 (p.115)

¹⁴¹ ROUSE (Artefact)

¹⁴² KENNEDY (p.37)

¹⁴³ Author’s own observation

mother¹⁴⁴. She fretted that Edward may not know how to behave in Alice's circles. There were more cries of horror from Alice's family. It is not known what Alice's mother's reaction was as she died in 1887, the year after they met. Alice's brothers threatened to estrange themselves from her and told her they would not recognize any children of her marriage¹⁴⁵. Equally, the three maiden aunts expressed their disapproval. One of them asked Alice "Why do you want to marry this poor musician who doesn't look as though he's likely to live for very long"¹⁴⁶. This was because they knew of Edward's ill health and hypochondriacal personality (which Alice had to learn to live with)¹⁴⁷.

However, they decided to marry. It could be speculated that Alice was instrumental in this decision – using her "managing" disposition. She had money inherited from her father and she knew that by selling Hazeldine House, she would have a substantial inheritance¹⁴⁸.

They chose to marry in Brompton Oratory, a very prestigious Catholic institution in London, having decided to move away from their provincial roots. The wedding was on May 8th, 1889. Alice's parents having died, her solicitor uncle stood in for them. Edward's parents attended, together with a friend of Edward's, Dr Charles Buck, from Settle in Yorkshire. Alice gave an undertaking that any children of the marriage would be brought up as Catholic. She formally converted to Catholicism in 1893¹⁴⁹. They married in a side chapel and afterwards, Alice sent the ribbon from her bouquet to Edward's mother¹⁵⁰.

Honeymoon and London Life

¹⁴⁴ ELGAR, WATSON, TROTT (p.73)

¹⁴⁵ YOUNG 1978 (p.95)

¹⁴⁶ YOUNG 1938 (p.95)

¹⁴⁷ YOUNG 1938 (p.95)

¹⁴⁸ YOUNG 1973 (p.108)

¹⁴⁹ KENNEDY (p.43)

¹⁵⁰ ELGAR RIBBON (Artefact)

It is likely that it was Alice (who had the money) who decided that they would honeymoon on the Isle of Wight for a 3-week stay¹⁵¹, and a decision was made to then settle in London. Clearly, they had both decided that a move out of the provinces would give Edward the best chance of furthering his composing career¹⁵², getting his music looked at, rehearsed and performed. Unfortunately, it was an unhappy year for them both. At this time, in the late 1880s, London was a heavily polluted city and with dense fogs coupled with the bitter cold, Edward suffered a series of coughs and colds. Alice claimed to never having been so chilled, she cried with the cold.¹⁵³

However, there was a happier side to them living in London, as they could afford season tickets to the orchestral concerts at Crystal Palace. Here they were able to hear the great classics of modern music; Schumann, Brahms and Wagner.¹⁵⁴ This time, in London, must have also been enjoyable for Edward, with no teaching commitments and being able to go to any concert he wished¹⁵⁵. Problematically, no one was interested in his work. No one had heard of him – he was an unknown provincial composer, and no one wanted to know him. London had plenty of music – they didn't need any more¹⁵⁶.

After their challenging year in London, they decided to return to their home base. By now Alice was pregnant and at the aged of forty one on 14th August 1891, gave birth to their only child¹⁵⁷, a daughter, who they called Carice Irene, combining the first three letters of Alice's first name and the last three of her middle name, making the name Carice. This name Edward had already invented at the time of their engagement and used it to dedicate the piece *Salut D'Amour* "à Carice", in 1887. (Edward always loved word games).

¹⁵¹ YOUNG 1973 (p.101)

¹⁵² YOUNG 1973 (p.98)

¹⁵³ MOORE 1987 (p.133)

¹⁵⁴ MOORE 1987 (p.133)

¹⁵⁵ MOORE 1984 (p.133)

¹⁵⁶ MOORE 1984 (p.134)

¹⁵⁷ MOORE 1984 (p.153)

Incidentally, Edward's engagement present to her was *Salut D'amour*, and became one of his most popular pieces. He sold the copyright to Novellos for 2 guineas and the work was arranged for solo violin, orchestra, solo voice, chorus etc. Had he kept the copyright, he would have benefitted financially. This work came about in an interesting way. At the end of August 1889, Edward went for holiday in Settle, Yorkshire to his cellist friend Dr. Charles Buck. Before he left, Alice gave him a poem *Liebgrüss* that she had written earlier in the month, meaning *Love's Greetings*. Whilst at Settle, Edward set her words for voice and piano. French titles were more commercially popular than German, Novellos changed the name to *Salut D'Amour – Love's Greeting*.

Return to "Home"

Psychologically, this return home must have weighed heavily on them both, maybe seeing the London year as a failure? However, they returned to Malvern and settled into married life. Edward returned to teaching and Alice took up her local friendships, which were with women of her age and her class¹⁵⁸. She began what she saw as her life's work, her devotion and support to her "EDU" or "EDOO" – her "care of a genius"¹⁵⁹. We know that during these early years of the marriage they collaborated on producing music set to Alice's words – from some of her earlier poetry. Their first joint work – A Song called "The Wind at Dawn", a poem by Alice written in 1880, was published in 1888¹⁶⁰ and was a prize-winning entry for a competition. They worked on a few joint collaborations during holidays abroad (holidays paid for by Alice's friends in some cases). (see Fig 3. - page 34 - Mr and Mrs Edward Elgar, on holiday, 1892).¹⁶¹ Alice sold Hazeldine House, and various items of Indian furniture and artefacts were moved to their Malvern home – which must have added to the 'colonial atmosphere'¹⁶².

Malvern Life

¹⁵⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p.99)

¹⁵⁹ YOUNG 1978 (p.94)

¹⁶⁰ YOUNG 1978 (p.94)

¹⁶¹ MOORE 1972 (p.20)

¹⁶² BURLEY (p.59)

Alice's life was now one of learning to live with Edward and his hypochondriacal nature and mood swings. She saw her life's work as one of devotion to Edward. She did write some poetry, but she seemed to have given up any thought of life outside the home. Her life as a woman of the upper middle class was one of conformity of women in her position¹⁶³. They were able to afford servants and a nurse for Carice. Alice would never have had to peel a potato or light a fire. She practiced the etiquette she had been taught and visited people, living "At Home" and receiving callers. The Elgars entertained a great deal and were entertained in turn. There is little evidence of Alice's involvement in any out-of-home activities, her care of Edward was her full-time job. As soon as Carice was old enough, she was sent to boarding school in Malvern¹⁶⁴ where she boarded together with girls of her own age, whose parents were living abroad. This was so the house could be peaceful for Edward to compose.¹⁶⁵ Carice spent her holidays at school with her fellow pupils and during the school week, only went home for Sunday lunch.

During this time, there is some evidence that Alice suffered a series of illnesses, which necessitated prolonged bed rest.

¹⁶³ GLEADLE (p.91))

¹⁶⁴ YOUNG 1978 (p.139)

¹⁶⁵ KENNEDY 1982 (p.115)

Shared Creativity

When they were collaborating on a musical work, Alice was the intellectual wing of the partnership. The sense of cooperation of sharing must have been very satisfying for them both. They began using a form of baby talk¹⁶⁶ when talking to each other – reinforcing the view that Alice saw her role as a “mothering” one. The 9-year age difference could have been a huge factor here. Alice began replacing Edward’s mother in her role in their lives.

During this time, there is some evidence that Alice suffered a series of miscarriages, although that word is not used in any diary.¹⁶⁷

Although theories of social motherhood have been formulated¹⁶⁸, this term applies to the role that middle and upper-class women took on outside the home. Ministering to the poor, providing advice and philanthropy to the lower classes, and forming a valuable component of social life in British Society.¹⁶⁹ Alice’s social motherhood was the mothering of Edward.

19th Century views of Marriage

Theories of marriage in the late 19th century saw a development of the separation of roles within a marriage¹⁷⁰. The conventional male breadwinner and female in the home became well defined for the middle and upper classes¹⁷¹. The definition of marriage as a social contract was talked and written about by Victorian Feminists¹⁷² but it is unclear whether Alice knew anything of these writings. It is undoubtedly clear that she had a

¹⁶⁶ BIRD (Intro. p.iiv-xv)

¹⁶⁷ GREEN (Article)

¹⁶⁸ YEO 1999 (Article)

¹⁶⁹ GLEADLE (p.67)

¹⁷⁰ LEVINE (p.129)

¹⁷¹ GLEADLE (p.47)

¹⁷² LEVINE (p.128)

settled and secure life with Edward. Once he started earning from his music and gained commissions their lives became stable, and Alice was able to cast off the role of Edward's muse (if that role ever even existed) and devote herself to him and his comfort. She became his manager, his business secretary, his hostess and his social secretary, and he acknowledged her contribution to his life only after she died in 1920,¹⁷³ (more of this in a Chapter 4).

Up to 1889, there are no surviving diaries written by Edward or Alice. There is a diary from 1890, written by Edward with an occasional entry by Alice. The joint diaries from 1891 given us no indication of any emotion, opinion, or annoyance of any kind, but do give us an insight into their domestic lives¹⁷⁴.

Conclusion

The early years of the marriage from 1889-1901 show us Edward's growing fame as a composer and Alice settling into a role of caring for a genius¹⁷⁵. These early years set the pattern for Alice's life. One could view the decision to marry Edward as courageous, as a step into the unknown. One can only speculate whether she calculated that even if Edward's talents did not lead to fame and fortune, they would have remained in Malvern, leading a middle-class life, Edward remaining a musical presence in the area and Alice fulfilling her role as housekeeper, secretary etc.

These early years, however, saw some of Edward's finest compositions and his establishment as a composer of the first rank. How much Alice was instrumental in this blossoming of his talents is discussed in a later chapter, but these early years resulted in Edward's talents being encouraged and recognized by the musical establishment.

¹⁷³ KENNEDY 1978 (p.286)

¹⁷⁴ Author's own observation

¹⁷⁵ KENNEDY 1947 (p.147)



Fig. 4: Alice with Carice, c.1892

(anonymous photograph)

(MOORE 1972, p.23)

Chapter 3:

Alice's Own Writings

Introduction:

This chapter will explore Alice's writings and consider her role models and influences when writing her one novel and her poetry. She also produced various translations using her modern European language abilities.

Content:

Caroline Alice Elgar née Roberts began her writing in 1872 (or 1873), when she was in her mid-twenties, having been born in 1848. At the time she was living in the sleepy rural village of Redmarley D'Abitot, on the borders of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, with her widowed mother. Her father had died in 1860, when Alice was 12 years old.¹⁷⁶

At this time in Victorian England, there were many well-known female poets, now famous. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (born 1806) had achieved fame for her writings, as well as for her marriage to another famous poet, Robert Browning. Other female poets of this era, include Christina Rossetti, Charlotte Mew and Felicia Newmans.¹⁷⁷ (Research on poetry of this era shows a prevalence of male poets – Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, etc.)

Alice wrote over 100 poems, but only 17 appeared in print. Edward set words by other poets, including Alice in over 60 pieces. No other composer set any of her work. Her poems that he did set to music are readily available. (See list at end of this chapter)

¹⁷⁶ YOUNG 1978 (p.28)

¹⁷⁷ GLEADLE (p.55)

First Writings

Alice's lack of formal education has been discussed in an earlier chapter and it could be safely asserted that due to her largely self-education, she was able to follow her own interests and inclinations. Her earliest writing that we know of, is not a poem but a geological essay "Words from my Window".¹⁷⁸ This describes the landscape around her home.

It seems that this arose out of work that Alice had been doing for Rev. W. S. Symonds. Alice was friendly with his daughter Hyacinth, and Rev. Symonds asked Alice for help with compiling the index to his book *Record of the Rocks*.¹⁷⁹ This essay is elegantly written but does not show any poetic sensibility. It is relevant for showing us Alice's interest in the world around her.

Early Poems

Alice's first known poem "Autumn" dates from 1877 and reflects the controversy between Creationism and Darwinism, which was raging at this time.¹⁸⁰ Alice moved in learned circles and attended meetings of several local naturalist's clubs where she heard eminent speakers from various eminent bodies such as the British Association for the Promotion of Science. Alice wrote several stories for children, during the late 1870s, but they remain unpublished.

When Alice was nearly 30, in the late 1870's and marriage not on the horizon, she had a burst of literary activity and by the end of 1878 had written at least another dozen poems, most of them quite melancholic, maybe reflecting her feelings of sadness.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p.58)

¹⁷⁹ YOUNG 1978 (p. 57)

¹⁸⁰ SUTTON (p.6)

¹⁸¹ YOUNG 1978 (p.63)

Her Long Poem

Soon after this in 1877, she embarked on a long poem – in blank verse, a narrative poem “Isabel Trevithoe”. This was printed, at her own expense at the end of 1878, by the Charing Cross Company. It has 62 pages of text, and Alice disguised her female identity by naming the author simply as C.A.R.¹⁸² It was not well received – the Malvern Times dismissed the poem in 4 lines, remarking that “blank verse should only be attempted by master minds”.¹⁸³ Other reviews were equally dismissive.¹⁸⁴ Sadly it is not known which poets Alice read, but the chapters of her only novel, published in 1882 – *Marchcroft Manor*, are headed by quotations from Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Emerson, Dante, Hans Christian Andersen, Homer, Edmund Spenser, Chaucer and Shakespeare. It can be assumed that she had read these writers and acknowledged their greatness.¹⁸⁵

Alice’s novel, *Marchcroft Manor*, was published, at her expense, in 1882 (in two volumes). Alice signed a contract with the publishers, Remington and Co., subject to a payment from Alice of £70, paid in two instalments.¹⁸⁶ Alice had been writing mostly poems and stories for about 10 years before this novel was published.

Her stories could be seen as a prelude to the novel. In a magazine called “Home Chimes” and in 1884, Alice had written a story called *Two Summers*. This magazine was a new venture and among other contributors were Jerome K. Jerome and J.M. Barrie.¹⁸⁷ This story could be seen as one of cloying Victorian sentimentality, foretasting the plot of her novel *Marchcroft Manor*. What Alice’s motivation for writing this novel is unknown. As a voracious reader (like her mother) she must have been well acquainted with the works of Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell and other writers of the time.

¹⁸² SUTTON (p.8)

¹⁸³ SUTTON (p.11)

¹⁸⁴ SUTTON (p.13)

¹⁸⁵ ROBERTS (1st Edition) (Chapter Headings)

¹⁸⁶ MITCHELL (p.6)

¹⁸⁷ YOUNG 1978 (p.79)

The Plot of the Novel – *Marchcroft Manor*

This revolves around 4 main characters – Julian and Roger, Olive and Ella. From the beginning, the reader is led into a plot of “Who marries Who?”¹⁸⁸ The main interest of the novel, however, is how much of Alice’s own opinions and views of the world, are voiced by her characters. The plot is a simple one. At the beginning of the novel, Julian unexpectedly inherits an estate called *Marchcroft Manor* from a distant relative. Julian lives in London and works in the Foreign Office. He finds the work irksome but enjoys the advantages of living in London. He sympathises with his own close friend – a barrister called Roger, who is interested in the progress of humanity and the improvement of the lower classes. Roger has “a taste for art and choice books and grew more absorbed in the pastime of culture as the years rolled on”.¹⁸⁹

The two women, Olive and Ella are sisters, staying with their uncle, in a Rectory near the estate. These two women are portrayed as having shallow lives, uneducated except in feminine pursuits, such as sewing, painting and conversation. In contrast to the male characters, they seem to be waiting to be educated.¹⁹⁰ They commit the heinous sin of not knowing more than is necessary for their well-being. They have a healthy indifference to things that are beyond their sheltered world.¹⁹¹

Interestingly, Alice describes the male characters looks in depth, their whole appearance was of refined gentlemen”.¹⁹² Eventually, after a series of mishaps and misunderstandings, the four main characters end up as two couples. Alice tells us that Julian becomes a distinguished politician and speaker and he attained “high honours and distinctions” and Roger “aspired to do great things and become a distinguished member of his profession”. However, the novel concludes “we do not know if Roger

¹⁸⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p.77)

¹⁸⁹ ROBERTS 1882 (p.281)

¹⁹⁰ MITCHELL 2020 (p.13)

¹⁹¹ MITCHELL 2020 (p.12)

¹⁹² YOUNG 1978 (p.76)

Osborne ever became Lord Chancellor”.¹⁹³ This is a puzzling sentence, leaving readers to wonder whether Alice was contemplating a sequel

Aspects of the Novel

By her use of judicious quotations used as chapter headings from essayists and poets, Alice gives us an indication of her own knowledge of literature. In the main, these chapter headings summarize the chapter ahead. There is a streak of mild radicalism, together with a need for social change, that Alice imbues in her main character. On reading this novel, the reader will find a theme for redressing social inequality and conservative traditions are challenged. Interestingly too, it is Roger who pleads for “ART – paintings, symphonies and statues who have not the same material value as say, a crop of wheat” – “but these things make existence bearable.”¹⁹⁴

Alice was thirty four when her novel was published so she had her own life-experiences to draw on. She certainly knew about the role of the law (as well as the army and the church) and the importance of these pillars of society and she used this knowledge to flesh out her two main male characters.

The Reviews

For a first novel by an unknown writer, *Marchcroft Manor* received a significant number of reviews, which Alice collected.¹⁹⁵ Some were critical of such a lightweight story. One was glad “it did consist of two volumes and not three”.¹⁹⁶ One reviewer (unnamed) recommends the author to aim at “simplicity of style and leave the ardent reformers and over-activated idiots to go their own way in peace”. Another concludes his review “I am much in favour of *Marchcroft Manor* that in spite of a worn-out plot, it is possible to read it with a certain amount of interest”.¹⁹⁷ It is a period piece and at 604 pages, (in this

¹⁹³ ROBERTS 1882 (p.285)

¹⁹⁴ ROBERTS C.A. 1882 (p.14)

¹⁹⁵ ROBERTS (Artefact)

¹⁹⁶ MITCHELL 2020 (p.13)

¹⁹⁷ MITCHELL 2020 (p.12)

author's copy) it is over-written and would have benefitted from the services of a good editor.

The conclusion of *Marchcroft Manor* gives us a glimpse of Alice's view of the roles available to the two women in the novel. She does not see them as fit for any independent career, but only fit for roles as angels in the house, devoted and supportive wives of successful and talented men of the world (in this respect, it foreshadows the marriage that Alice made).

Alice writes of her own view of the ideal husband, one of care, selflessness and devotion in marriage. These ideas were played out, eventually in her own life. Alice held romantic and escapist views, but she declined to concern herself with things of an unpleasant or vexatious nature. Of course, Alice's taste in fiction is unknown, but the headings of the chapters illustrate her knowledge of the great male writers.

On the title page of this 604-page novel, in the First Edition, Alice writes a quote by Boccaccio, in Italian - "Love has greater power than either you or I".¹⁹⁸ This could surely be Alice's belief.

Alice's Influences and Inspirations

Remembering that Alice's views on relationships and marriage would only have come from books, inspiring, influencing and shaping her view of life and love. Alice, born in 1848, would have had her teenage years and onwards to absorb ideas only from novels and other writings. Her own novel, published in 1882, when Alice was thirty four, was a platform for her to illustrate her own knowledge of literature as well as her views.

J.S. Mill asserts that women will always be imitators and never innovators.¹⁹⁹ However there had been a blossoming of female novelists; Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot and Jane

¹⁹⁸ ROBERTS 1882 (Title page)

¹⁹⁹ MILL (Preface)

Austen. Alice was following in a tradition of female novelists and writers, writing from her own observations and life experience.

Alice's novel does not have a female heroine or a male hero, while not being anti-male or anti-female. Another female writer, Elizabeth Sewell²⁰⁰ in her novel expressing her view on women's lives has little patience with an awed view of a novel with a male hero. Other women writers, Charlotte Bronte chose a female heroine in her novel *Jane Eyre*²⁰¹ and George Eliot did the same in *Middlemarch*.²⁰² In her book, *A Literature of Their Own*,²⁰³ Elaine Showalter describes the female literary tradition in the English novel, starting with the Brontes. Showalter argues against a female imagination, suggesting this confirms a female stereotype. Alice's novel does not conform in this sense.

The phenomenon of the New Woman²⁰⁴ entered the literary world in 1894 but had been visible in many male writers who weren't wholeheartedly committed to Women's emancipation. Thomas Hardy (in 1867)²⁰⁵ and Henry James (in 1871),²⁰⁶ write of women who could be labelled the 'New Woman', seen as lacking the attributes usually associate with Victorian womanhood (a talent for home-making, self-sacrifice and a willingness to defer to men).²⁰⁷ When looking for the influences on Alice, it is very frustrating that one does not know her taste in fiction and how she formed her ideas from the male and female writers of her time.

²⁰⁰ SEWELL (p.147)

²⁰¹ BRONTE 1847

²⁰² ELIOT 1871

²⁰³ SHOWALTER (p216)

²⁰⁴ LEDGER and LUCKHURST (p.77)

²⁰⁵ HARDY Thomas 1872

²⁰⁶ JAMES Henry 1871

²⁰⁷ LEDGER and LUCKHURST (p.76)

Cultural historians interested in the phenomenon of the “fin de siècle”, in the late 19th Century²⁰⁸ have seen this as time of cultural crisis and cultural politics. The norms of the Victorian age were threatened, empires were crumbling, and feminism was “on the march”.²⁰⁹ In England, socialism was a growing political movement. Alice living her early womanhood in a time of turmoil and cultural awareness, picked up on the murmurings in society and expressed some of these ideas in her novel.

However, the story avoids the predictable sound of wedding bells. The characters do not necessarily live happily ever after. Alice saw marriage as the beginning of a new life, as much as the end of another life. Alice makes it clear that her recipe for success is based on a wife’s great importance as a sympathetic supporter and encourager of her husband’s career, as well as providing comfort, security and a welcoming home, as a refuge from the outside world. The novel really does prefigure her marriage to Edward and their joint achievement.

The Elgar Family Diaries²¹⁰

It is possible to see a chronicle of the 31 years of the Elgar’s marriage, 1889-1920, when Alice died. These diaries are a picture of their many social engagements, their many visitors, as well as their day-to-day happenings. Sadly, they do not contain any illuminating or useful insights into their feelings, their vexations or their elations. From a practical perspective however, they are full of day-to-day events and details of taxi firms, domestic agencies, train delays and other external details. While of interest to Elgarian scholars, they do not illuminate any aspects of Alice’s character, except to reinforce what we already know of her organisational skills and her efficiency. As a hostess, she entertained a large amount, not just Edward’s musical friends and colleagues but her own circle of ladies of her own class.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ LEDGER and McCracken (p.3)

²⁰⁹ LEDGER and LUCKHURST (Preface - p.xxii)

²¹⁰ BIRD 2020

²¹¹ YOUNG 1978 (p.111)

Conclusion

To summarise Alice's writings, it is only possible to have a limited view of her writing talent. Her one novel and short stories tell a little of her views on life and marriage. Her stirrings of feminist leanings can also be seen, but Alice seems to be always aware of conforming to what society expected of her.

Alice continued her writing up to 1889, when she married Edward, but not in the same volume as before. She never published another novel. She may have wished for more recognition for her poetry and prose, but she diverted her creativity and energy in encouraging and supporting Edward in his career.

Michael Kennedy observed that were she to return today and see the position Edward Elgar occupies in the annals of English music, she might say "All this you owe to me" and she would be right.²¹²

This is a quote by Frank Schuster,²¹³ friend and financial contributor to Edward.

. . . an indefatigable hostess and marvellous manager . . .

FRANK SCHUSTER

²¹² KENNEDY 1982 (p.286)

²¹³ MCVEAGH 1955 (p.96)

Fig. 5: POETRY and PROSE by CAROLINE ALICE ROBERTS / ELGAR

(Published and unpublished works) (YOUNG 1978 (pages.186-189))

POETRY AND PROSE WORKS OF
CAROLINE ALICE ELGAR

Poems unless otherwise stated.

1873 (?) Worlds from my Window /a/ Geological Essay, 58-60
1876 20-23 October The Portrait (short story), 70-71, 100, 114
1877 3 June, The Flower and the Star; A Fantasy: } stories for children. 62
11 November Family Pride
n.d. Marian's Party
n.d. Human Life: A Simile
n.d. Down, down, down,
Down to the depths of the sea¹
n.d. The Snowflake²
27 December Autumn, 63
28 December The Reply³, 63
29 December The Snow (For a Child)⁴, 63, 74
1878 February Thought
25 April Senlac, 63
30 June Then he leapt upon his Horse⁵
3 July The Fight for the Shrine⁶, 63, 155
14 August Miserrimus: Inscription on a Tomb in Worcester Cathedral, 63, 64
27 August On a Castle in N. Ireland⁷, 64
6 November To ———, 64
She answers
22 December New Year
n.d. [Four] Songs of the Seasons and Hope⁸, 64
n.d. I know a Pretty Bell⁹
1879 14 April Isabel Trevithoe: A Poem by C.A.R.¹⁰, 12, 70, 71-5, 100, 117
14 April Désillusionné, 64
14 April Telle est la vie . . . quelquefois, 64
11 November To the Sea at Porth-kernow [Porth-curnow]¹¹, 64
n.d. On the Wings of the Wind: A Night Journey to the Arctic: story for children¹², 68-9
1880 1 June The Golden Stair—suggested by the picture of Burne-Jones¹³, 65
[1880] 21 June Yesterday¹⁴, 66
July Storm or Calm¹⁵, 66-7
15 August The Wind at Dawn¹⁶
13 September Full long ago in Arcadie
1882 6 April To G.E.L. [ander?]. Born on All Hallow E'en, 83
July Marchcroft Manor: A Novel in Two Volumes, published Remington Ltd., 12, 38, 40-41, 61, 70, 75-9, 81, 100, 114, 145
n.d. He would be a Hero: children's story, 68
1883 n.d. Whither?, at Bordighera, 83
1884 17 May Two Summers¹⁷, 79-80, 174
1886 18 March A Ballad of 1886, 84-5
1887 25 March Lyre and Song¹⁸, 87-8
31 March To emulate Marcus Aurelius, 88, 155
25 July An Admonition against Despondency, 86
October Renunciation, 90, 155
9 October Sonnet: Ways to the Mount, 91, 155
19 November A Benison, 91
1888 30 January Sonnet: "The Friend of the Bridegroom . . . rejoiceth greatly", 92, 155
11 February O Happy Eyes¹⁹, 92
March "It is appointed to all men to die once"²⁰, 93
29 April The World it is wide
8 May On hearing some orchestral music²¹, 94
1 June A Courtyard in Granada (A Courtyard is seen beyond)—suggested by a picture of the above name in the Grosvenor Gallery, 155
16 August Love's Grace, 94, 155
26 December Most dear my own beloved, let us hold, 96-7
n.d. Statue in the Italian Exhibition²²
1889 December(?) The Sunny Isles²³, 103, 155
13 December The Night is still²⁴, 104
Flies the Frost
1890 20 April Fair breaks the Spring²⁵, 107
1892 25 August A Spear, A Sword, 112
26 August 1588: Loose, loose the Sails²⁶, 112, 155
6 December The Millwheel I "Winter", 113, 155
II "May (a Rhapsody)", 113-14, 155
1894 January Above the Clouds²⁷
4 January The Wave
Muleteer's Song²⁸
1895 Words for six Bavarian partsongs for Chorus and Orches-

tra/Music by Edward Elgar. To E.E. from C.A.E.

5 March 1895, 115-35
(1) "The Dance (Zum [sic] Zugspitze/Im Sonnenbiche)"
(2) "Aspiration (Wamberg)"
(3) "Lullaby (Bei Hammersbach)"
(4) "False Love (Bei Sanct Anton)"
(5) "The Marksman (On the Alm)"
(6) "True Love"²⁹
(7) "Nought broke the Summer Silence (On the Kitzbühler [Horn])"³⁰
n.d. Ritter Gluck, trs. from Uhland³¹
21 June After
October Sighs in Summer³², 143, 155
1897 May Love alone³³, 143
1898 17 November The Dying [Warriors] Heroes, trs. from L. Uhland, 155
1900 20 July (?) The Violin, trs. from the Italian
1901 Love in Absence, 144
19 February Reconciliation: Come back, the sea lies still, 144-5
1904 16 November Something afar
1907 6 December A Christmas Greeting³⁴, 161-3
1909 25-27 December The Kingsway³⁵, 165
1914 20 November 4 August 1914³⁶, 177
1915 5 September-8 October Compensation³⁷, 178

Undated pieces

Three Sonnets:
Longing in Absence
Longing again
Love would give itself
Two Sonnets—Links
We strive, we labour, holding our own race
And if mere links we are, why yet despair?
Sonnet translated from the Vita Nuova (Dante):
So tender and so holy seems to be, 155
Twilight—a set of ten sonnets
Two lives
Long had I wandered weary through the world
rewritten as A Vision of the Night
Flies the frost & sighs the wind—"December 21st"
Something afar "words free", 155
Calypso's Lament, note by Elgar, "Begin lines where marked"
On the way, 155
Atalanta's Race
Destiny
Self-Delusion
Love's answers (Elvira to Bevis)
Love and Death (After seeing Mr. Watts' Picture)³⁸, 155
Twelve Sonnets
New Year
Mr. Hamilton's Grave
The world's wide space will know my name³⁹
Deep of earth's joys they drink⁴⁰
Prose
The Ideal in the Present, 145 ff.
Impressive things seen & heard
Things seen

(Note: small numbers in list refer to page numbers within the book)



Fig. 6: Carice with her pet rabbit at Plas Gwyn, Hereford (undated) (MOORE 1972 – p.51)

To Carice

Dear little ship, go forth
 High-hearted, south or north.
 Spread white and wide thy sails
 Buoyed with the Hope that never fails.
 Soon dawns the day
 When thou must take thy way;
 Must leave the lea
 And sail upon the sea,
 And breast the tides
 Which lash thy shrinking sides,
 And brave the blasts
 Which rock thy quiv'ring masts.

 Heed not the flying years;
 Pass on, unvext by fears.
 Steer bravely still, and find
 A strange new strength in every wind.
 May fortune pour
 For thee her richest store.
 May joy be thine,
 All love around thee shine.
 Then at life's end,
 We pray that Heaven send
 Thee, God's own peace
 The port, where waves and winds shall cease.

C.A.E.

Fig. 7: One of Alice's poems (undated) (MOORE 1972 - p.51)



Fig. 8: Alice at her writing desk

Photograph by Reginald Haines (undated)

(MOORE, 1972 - p.28)

Chapter 4:

Alice's contribution to Edward's work

Introduction

This chapter will examine, in detail, Alice's contribution to Edward Elgar's work as a composer by practical and psychological means. It will further the argument that without the presence of Alice in his life, Edward's glorious music may not have been written. Without Alice, he may have remained a jobbing musician, teaching, conducting choirs in Malvern and Worcester etc., composing when commissioned.

Edward Elgar's Method of Composing

Edward Elgar was unusual in his method of composing.²¹⁴ Unlike other composers whose methods involved the use of a piano to clarify and perfect musical ideas, it seems that Edward composed in his head- while out walking, cycling and even golfing. One of his most famous quotes – "Music is all around, you just take what you need"²¹⁵

The piano was certainly not his favourite instrument, he wrote comparatively little for this instrument. He was taught to play the viola and violin by his uncle and his father, but it seems he could master any instrument, if he needed to.²¹⁶

Alice as Edward's Muse

In the days of their courtship and early marriage, Alice was a muse for Edward. Certainly, her contribution to the marriage, in practical terms, was her small private income, money she had inherited from her father. She also inherited from her mother

²¹⁴ MOORE 1984 (p.247)

²¹⁵ NEWMAN (p.2)

²¹⁶ MOORE 2004 (p.10)

who had died in 1887, the year after Alice and Edward met and the year before they married. She would also inherit the grand country house, Hazeldine House, in Redmarley D'Abitot, which she eventually sold.²¹⁷

At the time they met in 1887, Edward was making a living by teaching in the myriad of private schools in Malvern, and in his rented studio in Malvern Town centre.²¹⁸ All accounts tell us that he was not a good teacher, no smiles, no jokes, not much encouragement. He likened teaching to “turning a wheel lathe with a dislocated shoulder”.²¹⁹ He was also conducting and rehearsing local orchestras, choirs and glee clubs, writing programme notes and generally taking whatever work he could find in the area.²²⁰

Life in London

Alice had money and it seems that it was she who decided they would settle in London, the centre of musical life in England.²²¹ At that time, after their honeymoon on the Isle of Wight – a fashionable place to holiday due to Queen Victoria’s frequent holidays at Osborne House. Once in London, Edward could give up his hated teaching commitments and endeavour to get his music looked at, rehearsed and performed.²²² This was not a success. No-one had heard of him, as he was considered as a “provincial musician” – a term of derision. Soon, Alice found that she was pregnant, and plans were made to return to their home area after the baby was born. So it is obvious that Edward did not earn any money during that time in London. They made the decision to return to Malvern.

Return to Malvern

²¹⁷ YOUNG 1978 (p.100)

²¹⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p.100)

²¹⁹ KENNEDY 1982 (p.32)

²²⁰ KENNEDY 1982 (p.23)

²²¹ YOUNG 1978 (p.101)

²²² KENNEDY 2004 (p.35)

After their daughter, Carice Irene was born in August 1891²²³, they moved into a rented house in Malvern which Edward creatively named “*Forli*” (a chivalrous knight).²²⁴ Edward took up his teaching commitments and some composing and Alice renewed her friendships and acquaintances. They still had Alice’s income to live on but psychologically, this move must have caused disappointment at unfulfilled ambition.

Alice’s Role in Edward’s Creative Process

Around this time, there are numerous indications on the manuscripts of Edward’s music of the importance of Alice’s role in his composition process. In routine work of preparing manuscripts for printing, Alice saved Edward hours of time.²²⁵ Using a skeleton format for a full score, Alice’s responsibility was to rule the bar lines, numbering the pages and once Edward had specified the instruments he need, she would bracket the instrument families onto each page.²²⁶ (see Fig. 4: - page 53 - Alice Elgar at her writing desk). For Edward’s large choral and orchestral works this would involve using large sheets of manuscript paper – preparing them for Edward’s orchestration. Edward usually acknowledged this help by amending her initials C.A.E in musical notation.²²⁷

There are other indications of Alice’s help in this routine work, and this help must have given Alice the opportunity to give Edward encouragement and approval of his creations. When they were cooperating on the creation of a project, using Alice’s words and Edward’s music, such as *In the Bavarian Highlands* (Op. 27), this must have been a happy time for them both. Edward was, maybe unconsciously, acknowledging Alice’s cultural abilities. This was early on in their marriage, after a holiday in Bavaria, paid for

²²³ YOUNG 1978 (p.108)

²²⁴ COLLETT 1981 (p.62)

²²⁵ ANDERSON 1990 (p.19)

²²⁶ MOORE 1972 (p.28)

²²⁷ ANDERSON 1990 (p.21)

by a friend of Alice.²²⁸ While on this holiday, Alice familiarity with German was welcomed. They were also able to visit Bayreuth and hear Tristan and Isolde and other Operas by Wagner.

From now on, Alice took on the various roles of secretary, manager of his diary, as well as giving Edward a great deal of help in the composition process.²²⁹ Alice was musical²³⁰ she played the piano well enough, to accompany solo singers and play duets.

Like women of her class, Alice employed a nurse to care for Carice and they always had servants. It is unlikely that Alice ever lit a fire, or peeled a potato! However, she had to organise the household ensuring peace and quiet for Edward.²³¹

Edward made it clear to his musical friends the unique help Alice gave him in various ways. He would play his new compositions to her, and he told Billy Reed (a long-standing violinist friend and colleague) "I know whether she approves or not, and I always feel there is something wrong with it if she does not approve." Apparently, he came down one morning to find a note pinned to a passage of writing, "All of it is beautiful and just right except for the ending.... Don't you think dear Edward that this is just a little! So it was rewritten and as I heard no more, I knew that it was approved."²³² This illustrated how important Alice's encouragement was integral to Edward's creativity. He had obviously received encouragement²³³ from his mother, and Alice took on this role by seeing Edward in his melancholic moods when he lacked inspiration.²³⁴ It could be asserted that Alice was his muse during their courtship and the early years of their marriage but it can be also seen that the nine years difference in their ages had important implications for their social and recreational activities.²³⁵

²²⁸ GREAVES (p.8)

²²⁹ ANDERSON 1990 (p.20)

²³⁰ WARDE (p.144)

²³¹ YOUNG 1978 (p.137)

²³² REED 1973 (p.23)

²³³ REED 1973 (p.22)

²³⁴ SPIEGL (p.76)

²³⁵ ALLEN 1997 (p.2)

Edward's spare time activities

Alice did not join Edward in his outdoor hobbies such golf,²³⁶ or cycling.²³⁷ Their daughter Carice joined Edward in these spare-time hobbies. Edward's many lady friends went cycling with him on exploratory rides around Worcestershire and Herefordshire.²³⁸ Journeys of 50 miles a day were commonplace, and Edward loved new crazes and he spent a fair amount of money on a modern bicycle.²³⁹

²³⁶ ALLEN 2004 (p.10)

²³⁷ ALLEN 1997 (p.1)

²³⁸ ALLEN 1997 (p.21)

²³⁹ ALLEN 1997 (p.3)

Edward's Other Women

The women friends of Edward's were known to Alice, and eventually welcomed by her. They provided him with the feminine company he clearly needed for his artistic temperament. However, this had the effect of keeping Alice at home, performing her house-keeping duties and other home-based activities. It can be assumed that this pattern suited Alice as anything that kept Edward happy was fine with her.²⁴⁰

In spite of very much speculation there is no clear evidence of any "misbehaviour" on Edward's part. He was a gentleman, in the best sense of the word. However, we must acknowledge the importance of the contribution of these women to Edward's music²⁴¹ and the roles of muses that became in some of his important works.

Alice in Public

Alice attended as many performances of Edward's music as she could, and she would defend Edward if she felt people hadn't treated him properly. She was a great promoter of Edward's music and when he became accepted in royal circles, she must have felt proud of her contribution to Edward's national and international career. When Edward was knighted in 1904,²⁴² and she became Lady Elgar, she must have been pleased and proud. Now they were both part of the aristocracy of England and Alice's life trajectory had achieved more than even she might have ever imagined.²⁴³

Conclusion

Alice's contribution to Edward's life and his music is hardly written about or documented. Elgarian opinion ranges from admiration of Alice, for her devotion and self-sacrifice to slight derision of her, and the subsuming of her own literary career.

²⁴⁰ YOUNG 1978 (p.149)

²⁴¹ SPIEGL (p.77)

²⁴² YOUNG 1973 (p.144)

²⁴³ ALLEN ed. Marchcroft Manor (New Edition 2024, Preface)

Suffice to say, that without Alice, we would not have the amount, nor the range of Edward's compositions. For her support, encouragement and defence of him (at times) we owe a huge debt of gratitude. She deserves more than acknowledgment and recognition, an important place in the musical history of England is what should be accorded to her.

It must be remembered that Alice was not unusual or remarkable in her support for her creative husband. Many other women, during earlier years will have sacrificed their own ambitions, not just literary, in their wish to fulfil "their duty".²⁴⁴

In this sense, Alice was conforming to what was expected of her – starting with her agreement to use her inherited private income to live on, in the early years of their marriage to her becoming the housekeeper, secretary and diary-keeper for Edward. Nevertheless, marriage for Alice had limitations but also benefits, her status in society as a married woman at a time when 38-year-old women who had not married had little prospects of an education or the training for a profession. In this sense, Alice settled for a life of conforming respectability.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ GLEADLE (p.175)

²⁴⁵ DYHOUSE (p.35)



Fig. 9: Lady Elgar in Court Dress (age 64) 1912
Photography by Claud Harris (MOORE, 1972 p.69)

Chapter 5:

Alice's support to Edward during his career

Introduction

This chapter will examine how Alice played such a large part in Edward's life and his composing career, by supporting him in every practical way as well as in his public life. Both practically and psychologically, she provided him with "support" in every sense of the word. It could be asserted that without Alice he would never have achieved as much as he did.

Source of Information

Once again information about Alice is largely dependent on the one book by Percy Young.²⁴⁶ This book has severe limitations as it is based on conversations between the author and Alice and Edward's daughter, Carice. Its reliability of her own views of her own mother's childhood and personality could be questioned. This book is not considered an academic tone. It is interesting to read of Alice's extensive family history and the history of the village in which she grew up. The book contains much of Alice's poetry but is not analysed in a learned way. The author fully acknowledges the help given to him by Carice who expressed her thanks to him. It is a slim book and leaves some questions unanswered. There is no discussion of the religious differences between Edward and Alice and the tensions these may have caused.

In the novel that Alice wrote, Young asserts that Alice was thinly disguising her life as it was, and as she dreamt it might be. This might be the case, but it is a matter of his opinion.

²⁴⁶ YOUNG 1978

Practical Support

It is impossible to know of Edward's life and his achievement without acknowledging Alice's practical help in every aspect of their home life together. From the early years of their marriage, when they were able to live on Alice's small private income (money inherited from her father in 1860 and later from her mother in 1887 and later still, from the proceeds of the sale of Hazeldine House.)²⁴⁷ She would have been able to exert (gentle) pressure on him to compose, as they were living on her money

Psychological Support

It could be suggested that Alice replaced his mother as Edward's supporter and encourager. Edward's sensitive nature obviously needed the faith of an older woman, and Alice fulfilled this role.²⁴⁸ All through Edward's creative life, he needed encouragement from these people, nearest to him, whose opinions he respected. This side of his nature illustrates the insecurity he suffered all his life when his work was not progressing well. Alice would have been well aware of his insecurities. His lack of a formal musical education, his Catholicism and his lower middle-class origins all weighed heavily against him - he felt. He also suffered from cognitive dissonance. He wanted to be accepted by the Worcestershire bourgeoisie but at the same time he despised them and their values.²⁴⁹

Other People's Comments and Practical Matters

Various people have expressed surprise and even irritation at instances of Alice's support for Edward. Carice tells us that when Edward was away from home, conducting, Alice fretted and worried endlessly about his welfare, and only relaxed when he was safely home. There are numerous examples of her fussiness and diligence to practical matters. She ensured his comfort when at home, or when away. He became the focus of

²⁴⁷ DRYSDALE (p.210)

²⁴⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p.193)

²⁴⁹ YOUNG 1978 (p.100)

her life, and his comfort was her satisfaction. Her own lack of ambition once they were married is understandable. She saw her role as caring for a genius. If ever they were settled in a house, Edward had only to complain that it was too cramped, or too noisy, for Alice to start looking for somewhere to move to, in order to satisfy Edward's nomadic inclinations.²⁵⁰ Over the years, she found their homes in Malvern, Hereford and London (to rent, not buy) and did all the organisation of the moves. She sent Edward away to stay elsewhere while she prepared the "new" house ready for him. She also ran the household, with the help of servants, which they could always afford, in common with households of then middle to upper class.²⁵¹

Edward's acceptance into Society and Court Circles

It is well known that Alice, always protective of Edward's reputation, expressed annoyance if she felt he had been slighted in any way, and her disapproval of some of Edward's friends stemmed from her dislike of them, despite her views, Edward continued to see these friends.

It seems that Edward himself asked for Queen Victoria's permission to dedicate *Caractacus* to her, by writing to the then Master of the Queen's Music – Sir Walter Parratt, Sir Walter replied, "I use your music constantly and the Queen likes it."²⁵² This request may have been suggested by Alice, there is no evidence for this, however. The gesture became Edward's first link with Court Circles. Alice must have been pleased with this recalling that her father received his knighthood from Queen Victoria in 1859. Edward (aged forty seven) was himself knighted by King Edward VII in 1904, achieving the kind of recognition his wife Alice felt he deserved.

Alice's Influences on Other People

²⁵⁰ COLLETT 1981 (p.9)

²⁵¹ LEVINE (p.133)

²⁵² MOORE 1984 (p.240)

As far as can be ascertained, Alice did not use any influence on other people to get work for Edward. Once Edward's music received national and international recognition (from 1899 onwards with *The Enigma Variations*)²⁵³ Alice may have realised that her role in Edward's life was one of purely practical help and support.

Alice's life became one of managing Edward's diary, his correspondence, organising their household, planning their travels, their entertaining, and their personal correspondence. She saw all this as her duty and appeared to have had plenty of coping mechanisms. She also had servants to organise, taxis to book, as well as meeting Edward's considerable medical needs. They were able to call on other family members (Edward's nieces)²⁵⁴ to come and help when Alice was not well. It seems Alice was always "in charge". She was obviously methodical and conscientious and able to devote her time to her "care of a genius."²⁵⁵ It seems that at this time she had subsumed any ambition to become a writer or not and she devoted herself to Edward. Without any evidence, it is hard to know whether Edward's disapproval of anything Alice did that was not directly for him, or related to him. There are no examples of Alice involving herself in any other happenings. Although major national events were taking place (Women's Suffrage, Irish Home Rule etc), there is little evidence of Alice's interest or involvement in these. She certainly did not express any options, that are recorded anywhere.

It is as though Alice cut herself off from anything problematic or vexing, that would impinge on her sheltered sphere, that did not concern her. During the war, she wrote patriotic verses and must have found Edward's friendships with people of German descent difficult to deal with. Friends such as Schuster²⁵⁶ and Rodenwald²⁵⁷ were friends and financial supporters of Edward.

²⁵³ McVEAGH 1955 (p.41)

²⁵⁴ MOORE 1984 (p.440)

²⁵⁵ KENNEDY 1982 (p.147)

²⁵⁶ KENNEDY 1982 (p.103)

²⁵⁷ KELLY (p.53)

There is no evidence of Alice joining any women's organisations, although there were opportunities for her to "get involved". From a feminist standpoint, it is hard to reconcile her comfortable lifestyle with her lack of interest in so many factors affecting women. Her regard for the 'status quo', as far as her life is concerned, is very evident.

Conclusion

Wives and partners of creative artists at this time, painters, poets, authors as well as composers, have been largely ignored by biographers, unless that have had a direct influence on the work of their husbands and partners.²⁵⁸ Great painters used their wives and partners as models, as well as their mistresses and they are available for us to see and admire. Other wives and partners lives are therefore unrecognised and unacknowledged.

By marrying Edward, Alice certainly conformed to what was expected of her (firstly from handing over her private income and then devoting herself to him) and gratitude is due to her for this devotion and the subsuming of any of her own creative ambitions.

Some of the biographies of Edward (25 at the last count) do acknowledge Alice's self-sacrifice and her total devotion to Edward, but not in any enlightening details. From the early years of their married life to her later years, Alice was always there at his concerts. Even when clearly unwell, in the last month of her life, she attended a concert of Edward's chamber music.²⁵⁹ Her devotion to him was paramount in her mind. It seems that anything that may have distracted her from this was not welcome, and her famous quote about "Caring for a genius" sums up her life, as she saw it. Without Alice, Edward's creative spirit, died with her, (see Chapter 6). He said, "everything I have achieved I owe to her."²⁶⁰ This acknowledgement by Edward, after her death, sums up Alice's life with Edward. A further private quote by Edward Elgar follows.²⁶¹

. . . my wife is a wonderful woman. I play phrases and tunes to her because she always likes to see what progress I have been making. Well, she nods her head and says nothing, or just 'Oh, Edward!' — but I know whether she approves or not, and I always feel that there is something wrong with it if she doesn't.

²⁵⁸ THOMAS (Intro.)

²⁵⁹ KENNEDY 1982 (p.285)

²⁶⁰ MOORE 1984 (Letter on p.755)

²⁶¹ REED 1978 (p.22-23)



Fig. 10: Alice in later years (age 68) in London, 1916. Photograph E.O. Hoppe (MOORE 1972 – p. 82) (Of note, this picture in Moore's book is printed the wrong way round)

(NOTE: Alice's book on the table is entitled *A House of Pomegranates* - a collection of fairy tales written by Oscar Wilde, published in 1891)

Chapter 6:

Alice's Death and Edward's Life after 1920

Introduction:

This chapter will consider how Alice's later life and death affected Edward and his life in 14 years of widowhood. (see Fig.10:- page 67 - Alice Elgar in later years, age 68, London, 1916).²⁶²

Alice died on April 7th, 1920, at their London home²⁶³, Severn House in Hampstead.

It has been asserted that Elgar wrote little of consequence before he met Alice in 1886 and little of consequence after she died. Between the famous piece dedicated to Alice on their engagement in 1888, *Salut D'Amour*, and the Cello Concerto in 1920, everything he wrote is saturated with his personality, and that after Alice's death - "The creative flame flickered so low that Edward confined his energies to works which were based on ideas and sketches made during Alice's lifetime."²⁶⁴

This work came about in an interesting way. At the end of August 1889, Edward went for a holiday in Settle, York with his cellist friend Dr Charles Buck. Before he left, Alice gave him a poem she had written earlier in the month, entitled Love's Greetings. While at Settle, Edward set these words to a piano work, she called it *Liebgruss – Love's Greeting*. Because French titles were more popular than German, his publisher Novellos changed the title to *Salut D'Amour*. He dedicated it to "à Carice", his first use of the name derived from Caroline Alice which they then bestowed on their only daughter.²⁶⁵

²⁶² MOORE 1972 (p.82)

²⁶³ MOORE 1984 (p.752)

²⁶⁴ KENNEDY 1984 (Article)

²⁶⁵ YOUNG 1978 (p.110)

Other dedications to Alice are few and far between. It would be interesting to know whether he offered to dedicate more works to her, and she refused. Oddly he dedicated works to all sorts of people in his life – choir masters, violin pupils and even *Pietro d'Alba*, Carice's white pet rabbit.²⁶⁶ (see Fig. 6: - page 53 - Carice and her pet rabbit)

Although there are lists of works written by Elgar, after 1920, these are considered by musicologists to be “bottom drawer” pieces, using ideas that existed long before and were therefore reworkings of previous imaginings. These “minor works” are not necessarily minor in scale but do not display the melodic invention of Edward's earlier works.

Alice's Decline and Last Illness

Alice's decline began in late 1919, where she took to her bed with various ailments, kidney and heart problems. The New Year of 1920 brought some determination to resume the social round. Alice began visiting again, lunching out, and attending some plays and concerts.²⁶⁷

However, by March 1920, she was seriously ill again and various visitors have told of finding “Alice losing weight” and referring to her “listlessness and apparent fragility”.²⁶⁸ Rosa Burley, friend and Carice's former headmistress had visited and found Alice “shrunk and terribly depressed.”²⁶⁹

Edward's diary refers to Alice as “very ill, retaining nothing. Alice very unwell, in great pain, insomnia and incoherent.”²⁷⁰

The Cause of Death

²⁶⁶ MOORE 1972 (p.51)

²⁶⁷ YOUNG 1978 (p.182)

²⁶⁸ REED 1938 (p.130)

²⁶⁹ BURLEY (p.201)

²⁷⁰ KENNEDY 1982 (p.285)

The most definitive cause of death, as recorded by Young, was “chronic interstitial nephritis and uraemia / coma”. This could only have been told to him by Carice.²⁷¹ Alice was 72 when she died and therefore had surpassed the life expectancy for women at that time. (Edward was a widower aged sixty three). Young asserts that Alice took herself away from the modern world and in her later years withdrew from any interest in wider affairs.²⁷² Carice claims her mother became “bored and boring”.²⁷³

Alice’s Funeral and Burial

Alice was buried at St Wulstan’s Roman Catholic Church in Little Malvern, Worcestershire on Saturday April 10th, 1920.

It seems there was only 3 clear days between her death and her funeral, which suggests arrangements being made well beforehand. Alice had chosen the site in the cemetery for her grave. In a letter to his friend Frank Schuster (12/4/1920), Edward wrote “The place she chose long years ago, is too sweet – the blossoms are white all round it and the illimitable plain with all the hills and churches in the distance, which were hers from childhood, looks just the same – inscrutable and unchanging.”²⁷⁴ So began another chapter in Elgar’s life – A life without Alice.

Funeral arrangements and Afterwards

Edward’s ceremonial sword, and medals were put into her coffin, Edward obviously feeling that she deserved them as much, if not more than him.

²⁷¹ YOUNG 1978 (p.183)

²⁷² YOUNG 1978 (p.182)

²⁷³ YOUNG 1978 (p.183)

²⁷⁴ MOORE 1984 (p.755)

The obituary to Alice in the Times headlined “Devoted Helpmeet of Master Musician”,²⁷⁵ this set the tone for other obituaries. Edward received letters and telegrams of condolence from King George V, Queen Mary and other members in Court. During the funeral, some of Edward’s music that Alice particularly loved were played – the slow movement of the String Quartet Opus 83 (1919), which she had described as “captured sunshine”.

In his diary, on the date of Alice’s death, April 7th 1920, Edward inscribed 4 lines of Swinburne.

“Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear
 Let us go hence, together, without fear
 Keep silence now, for singing time is over
 And all old things and all things dear”.²⁷⁶

In the immediate days after Alice’s funeral, Rosa Burley came to the Church House in Little Malvern, where Edward and Carice were staying.²⁷⁷ Carice overheard Rosa saying that she saw herself as standing in as Carice’s mother and would like to take over the running of the Elgar household for the future. Whatever Rosa said, this ended the long friendship between Rosa and Edward. They never met again²⁷⁸ and after a few days, Edward went to stay with his sister Pollie, in Stoke Prior, where Alice had never visited. Pollie had a dog which became Edward’s constant companion. Alice never cared for dogs and now, Edward could indulge his love of dogs - eventually owning 5 at once. Two of these dogs outlived him and are buried at Edward’s Birthplace, Lower Broadheath, Worcestershire.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ YOUNG 1978 (p.182)

²⁷⁶ MOORE 1984 (p.753)

²⁷⁷ MOORE 1984 (p.753)

²⁷⁸ BURLEY (p.203)

²⁷⁹ Author’s Own observation

Edward found the sight of the woods and fields that Alice had never seen, very comforting.²⁸⁰ On the last day of April he returned to Severn House to face probate, valuation and a mountain of condolences.²⁸¹

When Alice died and after her Catholic funeral, Edward was able to indulge his nomadic character, it was Edward who always instigated a house move. Carice, aged twenty nine, was still unmarried (she married in 1922) and so proved to be the main support for Edward. She returned to Severn House and started to sort out her mother's belongings.²⁸²

During their living in London, Alice was able to indulge her wish to be part of London Society and we have evidence that she "entertained indefatigably". The diaries are full of people they entertained, and many visits made to be entertained.²⁸³ This constant entertaining, however acceptable to the company was a drain on Edward's strength. Alice thrived in London Society. As Lady Elgar, she wrote "So nice to be in London again, after visiting Bradford with its very local atmosphere."²⁸⁴ The decision to move to London from Hereford was probably Alice's wish to be part of Society that she aspired to.

Amongst the mountain of condolences were letters from King George V and Queen Mary. This tells of Edward's standing in Royal circles and his reputation among the aristocracy of a foremost cultured figure.

The decision to sell Severn House had been made before Alice died but the house did not sell. It eventually sold at auction and Edward took a flat at 37, St James Place W.1. He joined Brooks (Gentlemen's Club) and in May 1924, became Master of the Kings Music,

²⁸⁰ MOORE 1984 (p.754)

²⁸¹ MOORE 1984 (p.255)

²⁸² MOORE 1984 (p.755)

²⁸³ YOUNG 1973 (p.182)

²⁸⁴ YOUNG 1973 (p.187)

succeeding Sir Walter Parratt. However, his life was saddened by the deaths of various friends.²⁸⁵

Edward's Creative Life after Alice's death

In the most comprehensive compilation of Edward's works, in Kennedy, there are 3 ½ pages of works completed from 1921-1934²⁸⁶ – Edward's death. The Cello Concerto of 1919, considered to be his Requiem for the dead of the World War and the Piano Quintet, also of 1919, are considered by musicologists to be his last major works. This opinion is not universally accepted however, and opinions vary, the quality of these later works written after 1920, is a matter of discussion among musicologists.²⁸⁷

Other music, whilst well worth hearing is considered minor Elgar, and lacking inspiration. Alice, it seems, was his muse, particularly in the early years of their marriage, but then became his secretary, hostess, enabler, business manager and supreme advocate. There were sketches made for a *3rd Symphony* and various projects were apparently discussed, but without Alice he seems to have lost his creative spark.

In common with men of his generation, he seemed diffident in expressing publicly how much Alice meant to him²⁸⁸ and it is only after Alice's death, that he expressed feelings of gratitude and thankfulness. The lack of dedications of his major works to Alice is puzzling- surely a way of expressing his love and gratitude to her? She may have refused any dedications, but as a way of public expression of the importance of Alice in his creative life, surely this would have been the ideal opportunity.

However, it is known that Edward was simply stunned by the loss of Alice and after selling Severn House, he began to lead a bachelor-style existence, joining London Clubs

²⁸⁵ YOUNG 1973 (p.252)

²⁸⁶ KENNEDY 1984 (pages 355-358)

²⁸⁷ HARPER SCOTT (p.127)

²⁸⁸ TOSH (Intro.)

and living in his rented London flat.²⁸⁹ Edward wrote to Walford Davies, a fellow composer, “All I have done was owing to her and I am at present a sad and broken man – just stunned.”²⁹⁰

This utterance from a grieving widower is a revelation. As far as can be evidenced, Edward made no public statement about his indebtedness to Alice. Of course, it is not known whether, in private, he expressed his gratitude to her but looking back at the trajectory of her life, it seems at first glance, that she gave up her own career as a poet and novelist, when she married Edward in 1889. She may have realised that with her money and Edward’s talents they “could make a go of it”. It could be said that she saw in Edward, “a colt that could be a Derby winner”²⁹¹ (Kennedy) and that is what happened. By marrying Edward, Alice was both conforming and rebelling.

Reflecting back, in 1919, the year before Alice died, he completed two major chamber works, considered amongst the finest – *The Piano Quartet (Op. 82)* and *The Cello Concerto (Op. 83)*. The Concerto is seen as Elgar’s Requiem for the 1st World War. Other works of note written in this decade include *The Nursery Suite*, dedicated to their Royal Highnesses the Duchess of York (the late Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother) and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. The three were present at the recording of the work on 23rd May 1931.²⁹²

In the 14 years of his widowerhood, Elgar made some friends who, in their different ways had an important influence on his and more importantly, on his legacy. George Bernard Shaw met Edward in 1928.²⁹³ in Stratford, where Elgar has moved to Tiddington House near Stratford-on-Avon. The two men attended the Shakespeare Festival and Edward found Shaw an admirer of his music. It was Shaw, who suggested to Lord Reith, then Head of the BBC, that Edward be commissioned to write a 3rd

²⁸⁹ MOORE 1984 (p.760)

²⁹⁰ MOORE 1984 (p.755)

²⁹¹ KENNEDY 1982 (p.43)

²⁹² KENNEDY 1982 (p.315)

²⁹³ MATTHEWS (Article – CD notes 1997)

Symphony. Edward left this work unfinished and in sketches, - to be completed in 1998 by Antony Payne²⁹⁴ at the request of the Elgar Family Trust.

In 1921, while on holiday in Switzerland Carice had met a gentleman, a farmer, called Samuel Blake, who was the same age as her. He proposed marriage to which Edward consented. They were married in 1922, Carice henceforth styled herself as Carice Elgar Blake.

Again, certain happenings did lighten his life. He had been awarded the O.M. (order of Merit) in 1911 (a gift of the sovereign) and in April 1924, he was appointed Master of the King's Music which was a great honour. In 1931, HMV opened new studios in Abbey Road, St Johns Wood, London, and Edward was invited to perform the opening ceremony. He acquired a motor car and enjoyed motoring around the Worcestershire lanes, having employed a chauffeur. In 1932, Fred Gaisberg (who had become a good friend) was an employee of H.M.V. He took Elgar to The Grosvenor House Hotel for a rehearsal of the Violin Concerto, with Yehudi Menuhin. The work was then recorded on 14th and 15th July and has become a classic gramophone recording. In 1933, Edward flew to France, from Croydon Airport to visit Delius, who had not long to live. Edward had welcomed the bicycle and the motor-car and now welcomed the aeroplane. He loved anything new and would have embraced technology with great enthusiasm.²⁹⁵ These 14 years of Edward's life were a mixture of the usual round of conducting commitments, and social visiting.²⁹⁶

Edward's Last Years

After an exploratory operation in 1933, he was found to be suffering from inoperable cancer and after much suffering, he died in February 23rd 1934, at 7:45 am. He was 76 years and 8 months old. Although he had specifically asked to be cremated and his ashes to be scattered at the junction of the Teme and the Severn, where he used to fish. It seems that Carice overrode this wish. He had, for many years avoided attending church,

²⁹⁴ MOORE 1984 (p.759)

²⁹⁵ ALLEN 1997 (p.2)

²⁹⁶ MOORE 1984 (p.759)

and he refused to see a priest. However, in his last few days, Carice arranged for a Catholic Priest from St George's Roman Catholic Church to be admitted to his room and he told Carice that her father had reaffirmed his adherence to the Roman Catholic Faith.²⁹⁷ He was buried 3 days later, at Alice's side, at St Wulstan's Church, Little Malvern, Worcestershire. There was no music. It is of note, that Edward was later commemorated in the Anglican Worcester Cathedral by a window based on the subject of his work, *The Dream of Gerontius*, whose words were by the Catholic Cardinal Newman.

A female friend, Alice Stuart Wortley, wrote to Carice with condolences saying:

"He is our Shakespeare of music,
born and died in the soil in the heart and soul of England,
with his love of his country, its music, and this meaning in his own heart and soul.
I think of you all today as the prayers of England goes with him,
as you give him back to that soil and whilst we cannot go with him,
he remains with us in all his wonder-works".²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ YOUNG 1973 (p.330)

²⁹⁸ KENNEDY 1978 (p.330, Letter from Alice Stuart Wortley)

Conclusion

The Six Chapters

The First Chapter of this thesis examined Alice's childhood and her upbringing. It argued that this style of parenting was typical of girls of her social class, preparing her for the continuation of a comfortable, secure upper-class life in the society in which she lived. It also showed her early ambitions to become a writer.

The Second Chapter then examined the courtship and eventual marriage of Alice and Edward and how Alice's ambitions became subsumed into her full-time care of Edward. His marriage to Alice gave Edward the background comfort in which his talent blossomed.

The Third Chapter, examined Alice's own writings before she met Edward and during their marriage. (A full list of her writings is at the end of Chapter 3). No attempt to critically analyse her writings has been made however.

The Fourth Chapter illustrates in detail Alice's contribution to the life of a great composer and how she ensured that Edward was always able to write his music in conducive surroundings. The Fifth Chapter shows in details how Alice's support was so important to Edward during his creative years, her mothering role replicating his own mother and her skills as his manager, advocate, secretary etc., enabled him to follow his artistic ambitions.

The Final Chapter considers Edward's life after 1920, the year after Alice died. It shows how much Alice meant to Edward and how his creative gifts were lessened by her absence in his life and his 14 years of widowerhood were lived as a bachelor.

This Thesis has been written to reinforce the argument that Women's Roles in the partnerships of their creative husbands and partners deserves more acknowledgment and recognition. There are limitations in this thesis, the difficulties in the research of proving things that are supposedly "always known" about Alice's life, but there is no way

to overcome this problem. The reliance on the conversations that early researchers had in the 1970s and 1980s with servants and children and the reliability of these must be questioned. It has been impossible to find evidence for some of the myths surrounding Edward and Alice and their marriage. Many questions remain unanswered and it may never be possible to find the sources of some of these myths. There are so many anecdotes about Alice and Edward and their life together and about Alice's role in the production of Edward's music. However, it can be stated quite categorically that without Alice we would not have the music in such volume and quality.

Overview

The recognition of Alice Elgar and her contribution to the life and work of Edward Elgar, has not been properly acknowledged, in common with many wives and partners of creative artists of the time – as even now in the 21st Century.²⁹⁹

Her devotion and self-sacrifice to Edward during their 31 years of marriage, 1889 till Alice's death in 1920, has been mentioned in most of the 25 biographies of Edward. However, more needs to be documented regarding her personality and character, which had such an influence on her composer husband. It could be suggested that without Alice, Edward would have stayed a provincial, jobbing musician, earning money where he could find employment in the musical worlds of Malvern and Worcester. She enabled him to go beyond this small environment by offering him her support and encouragement that hitherto his mother had provided.³⁰⁰

She also had at this time, a small private income from money inherited from her father who died in 1860, when Alice was 12. Alice later inherited money from her mother who died in 1887, before Alice married Edward and she benefitted from the proceeds of the sale of the family home.³⁰¹ During Alice's formative years, it seems there was no encouragement of her personal and intellectual ambitions. Her parents sent her 2 older

²⁹⁹ OAKLEY (Preface - page xi)

³⁰⁰ MOORE 2004 (p.18)

³⁰¹ MOORE 2004 (p.19)

brothers to the private fee-paying Cheltenham College for their education.³⁰² Despite this, she became a published poet and novelist, with more in print than Edward, at the time of their marriage. Any examination of Edward's character and ambitions at the time they met, leads to an opinion of a person carrying two disadvantages in his life, as he perceived them. Class and Religion marked Edward, and he felt a distinct cognitive dissonance about both these factors. He, the son of a shop keeper, part of the lower middle class, knew he needed the approval of the gentry towards his music. At the same time, he disapproved of their fatuity, their fawning behaviour and their flightiness, as he saw it.³⁰³

The religious difference between Edward and Alice, he being Roman Catholic, she Church of England, may have caused disquiet. There being a general anti-Catholic feeling in England at the time, Edward's father (although an agnostic) was the organist at St George's Catholic Church in Worcester, and his mother, a convert to Catholicism had brought up all their seven children in the Catholic faith³⁰⁴ (although Edward's father may well have disapproved).

Meeting Alice in 1886, when she went to Edward for piano accompaniment lessons, must have been a revelation. A woman in early middle age (age 38) able to understand his love of music and literature, similar to his mother, and later to understand his doubts and fears must have been quite an eye opener to Edward. During their courtship, Alice may have made the decision to give up her idea of a literary career. She eventually devoted her time to the care of Edward, becoming his secretary, hostess, manager, and his greatest advocate. She also became his enabler – allowing him freedom from any domestic concerns or worries. She resented any criticism of her "EDOO" (her pet name for him) and she was protective of his reputation, in many ways.³⁰⁵

³⁰² YOUNG 1978 (P.39)

³⁰³ YOUNG 1978 (p.100)

³⁰⁴ KENNEDY 1982 (p.23)

³⁰⁵ KENNEDY 1982 (pages 142-143)

She continued to write poetry after their marriage but there is no evidence of further fiction. Her life was devoted to Edward and became one of self-sacrifice whilst conforming to society's expectations. Edward had a complex artistic temperament needing encouragement for his work, and this combined with his hypochondriacal personality and mood swings must have made life difficult at times. There are numerous entries in the diaries referring to Edward's ailments: sore throats, quinsy, earache, vertigo, dizziness and frequent eye strains. Later research has shown Edward suffered from chronic tonsillitis and his health improved, when in later life, he had his tonsils removed.³⁰⁶

There is little doubt, that without Alice's encouragement and support, Edward would have spent more time indulging in his various hobbies and crazes. Alice knew the importance of these leisure activities and she encouraged them, knowing that Edward needed energetic outdoor pursuits to nurture his creative instinct.³⁰⁷ Alice's income enabled Edward to step outside the lower middle class of his origins and upbringing and become socially mobile, moving into the upper middle class and eventually into the gentry and then the aristocracy.

Marriage to Edward brought Alice empowerment but also limitation: empowerment in a role and status in society but limited in binding her into a domestic role which she accepted. She subordinated her own identity and ambition to support Edward's care, which she saw as a duty. Her support to Edward was emotional, financial and social. She was aware of her lack of beauty which she lamented for Edward's sake.³⁰⁸

Her unacknowledged part in the rise of his fame and the dismissiveness in the biographies of Edward is typical of the unrecognition of the role of women supporting their husbands / partners at this time in British Society. The division of labour, with separate spheres of living, men "out and about" and women "at home" illustrates this

³⁰⁶ HARCUP (Article)

³⁰⁷ ALLEN 1977 (p.60)

³⁰⁸ YOUNG 1978 (p.99)

perfectly,³⁰⁹ when examining Alice's life with Edward. Alice fulfilled societal expectations perfectly without any recognition.

Alice's personal aspirations may have been limited by these societal expectations. Women of Alice's class would not have had to earn money by having a career outside the home.³¹⁰ Alice may have pursued her literary ambitions, but always for Edward's benefit for a song he was writing, not for her own fulfilment.

When they met in 1886 and during the early years of their marriage, Alice used her social networks to cultivate useful friendships that might help Edward's career. Thus, she had an informal influence on the promotion of Edward's music. It can be asserted that Alice (and many other women) made hidden contributions to cultural life and this role deserves acknowledgment and recognition.

Restrictions of time and space has meant that no criticism or analysis of Alice's writings has been possible in this thesis. Further research could examine Alice's writings and express views on the quality of her work, and its place in the cultural life of the time. Many other areas for future research suggest themselves eg. an examination of the influence on Edward's musical output, of his women friends – who were also friends of Alice and who welcomed these friendships.

A study of the life of other women relatives of Edward particularly his mother, sisters and Carice his only child, would yield insights into Edward's creative process. Information about Carice is sketchy and an examination of the relationship with Alice would shed light on Alice's ability to parent, as an older mother, as well as her possible jealousy of the "chumminess" of Carice's relationship with Edward.

It is very noticeable in the early photographs of Alice, how much like Edward's mother she looks, the nine-year age difference is very marked. The photographs in this thesis

³⁰⁹ STEINBACH 2004 (p.44)

³¹⁰ LEVINE 1982 (p.83)

are from one book³¹¹ that has reproduced photographs of Alice. In contrast to the many informal and formal photographs of Edward, there are far fewer of Alice.

Alice's contribution to Edward's life was enormous and without her, we may not have Edward's glorious masterly music. He may well have remained a provincial musician, albeit well-respected and acknowledged. Alice's devotion to his talents enabled his genius to flower and develop into the fame he eventually received. Her belief in him and his genius was unwavering and without this, his talents may not have been given full rein.

Once in her middle years, someone asked Alice whether she regretted having given up her career as a poet and novelist. Her reply is revealing and could be a fitting epitaph for Alice.

“Oh No, my dear,
The care of a genius is enough work of a life for any woman”.³¹²

³¹¹ MOORE 1972

³¹² KENNEDY 1982 (p.147)



Fig. 11: Alice in her garden in Plas Gwyn, Hereford, 1910

Photograph by Percy Hull

(MOORE 1972, p.51)

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