

# THE FINZI JOURNAL



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Cover drawing of Gerald Finzi by his wife Joy Finzi from *In That Place, The Portrait Drawings of Joy Finzi*, Libanus Press, 1987





## CONTENTS

Editorial		5
Gareth Roddy	The Music of George Butterworth and the Reception of the English Pastoral, 1910-1939	7
Stephen Duncan Johnston	Wilfred Brown's Folksongs	44
Bookshelf:		56
Stephen Lloyd	George Dyson, his life and music; by Paul Spicer	56
Lewis Foreman	Constant Lambert: Beyond the Rio Grande; by Stephen Lloyd	64
Martin Neary	The Music of Herbert Howells; edited by Phillip A. Cooke, and David Maw	67
Contributors		73



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Finzi Friends was formed in 1982 to further interest in Gerald Finzi's life and work and bring together people with similar interests, to encourage and promote performances of Finzi's work and that of other British composers. We publish an annual Journal and occasional Newsletters, containing articles relating to Gerald Finzi and other British composers, reviews of CDs and books, and news regarding the organisation and forthcoming performances of Finzi's works. We hold occasional workshops and study days, often organise a lunch and lecture at the Three Choirs Festival, and are involved in promoting the Ludlow Weekend of English Song.



## FOREWORD

Welcome to the 2015 Journal of The Finzi Friends. I hope you will find it both stimulating and diverting, and a worthwhile addition to the existing literature about Gerald Finzi and those who influenced, or were influenced by him.

There is a sense in which the two main articles in the journal 'bookend' Finzi's life. Gareth Roddy's carefully researched thesis on George Butterworth has a direct relevance to Gerald Finzi. Firstly, the period in question covers Finzi's formative years, and the thesis considers the impact of The Great War, in which so many fine musicians lost their lives, including, of course, Finzi's teacher, Ernest Farrar. Secondly, and fascinatingly, the thesis continues to document the reception of Butterworth's music after his death. This gives some telling insights into the musical climate between the two world wars, during which time Finzi was finding his mature compositional voice.

Stephen Duncan Johnston's exploration of Wilfred Brown's recital encores provides a new view of this notable singer, famous, of course, for his evergreen recording of *Dies Natalis*, made after Finzi's death. The inclusion of several of Wilfred Brown's witty texts for these songs is a great bonus. The picture that is painted provides an amusing counterweight to the strong spirituality of Brown's singing of *Dies Natalis*, and a link to a world of musical performance that is receding fast with the recent loss of other singers contemporary with Finzi, such as John Carol Case.

The two book reviews cover major works about two diverse twentieth century composers, Sir George Dyson and Constant Lambert. Each provides a strong impetus to acquire and read these recent studies by key scholars of this period in English music. We are fortunate to be



able to publish alongside these reviews the transcript of Martin Neary's 'breakfast talk' at a convention of the Association of Anglican Musicians, Washington DC in June, 2014. This focuses on the music and persona of Herbert Howells, so closely tied in with the world of Finzi, Gurney, Vaughan Williams and of the Three Choirs Festival.

I am grateful to Rolf Jordan for commissioning this fine array of articles for the current journal, and to fellow committee members Jennie McGregor-Smith and Jim Page for their help in bringing it to publication. In 2016 we mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gerald Finzi's death. The threads of this journal seem likely to run through the next edition also; it would be fascinating to explore performance reception of Finzi's work in the period after his death, and current trends, as well as considering further the attitudes of those who sang and played for him, and those who continue to perform his music today.

Martin Bussey  
Chairman, Finzi Friends





# THE MUSIC OF GEORGE BUTTERWORTH AND THE RECEPTION OF THE ENGLISH PASTORAL, 1910–1939

Gareth Roddy

## Introduction

The very limited existing literature on George Butterworth pays little attention to the reception of his music. Michael Barlow's *Whom the Gods Love* is biographical in focus, ending its narrative with Butterworth's death in 1916.<sup>1</sup> Ian Copley's centennial biography is similarly concerned with the life, and its reflection in the works, of Butterworth.<sup>2</sup> Paul Leitch's article *Butterworth's Housman Re-Assessed: Lad Culture* explores how Butterworth musically replicated the nuances of emotion in Housman's poetry,<sup>3</sup> and Michael Dawney's *George Butterworth's Folk Music Manuscripts* offers examples of Butterworth's collected folk-tunes, as well as some biographical information.<sup>4</sup> What is missing is an account of how people reacted to Butterworth's music when it was first heard, how reactions have changed over time, and what this can tell us about contemporary society.

The main body of sources used to access musical reception are newspaper articles. In 1939, 69% of the population over the age of sixteen read a national newspaper, and 82% read one of the national Sunday newspapers. Sales of national dailies increased from 4.5 million in 1910 to 10.5 million in 1939. Entertaining newspapers aimed at the lower middle-

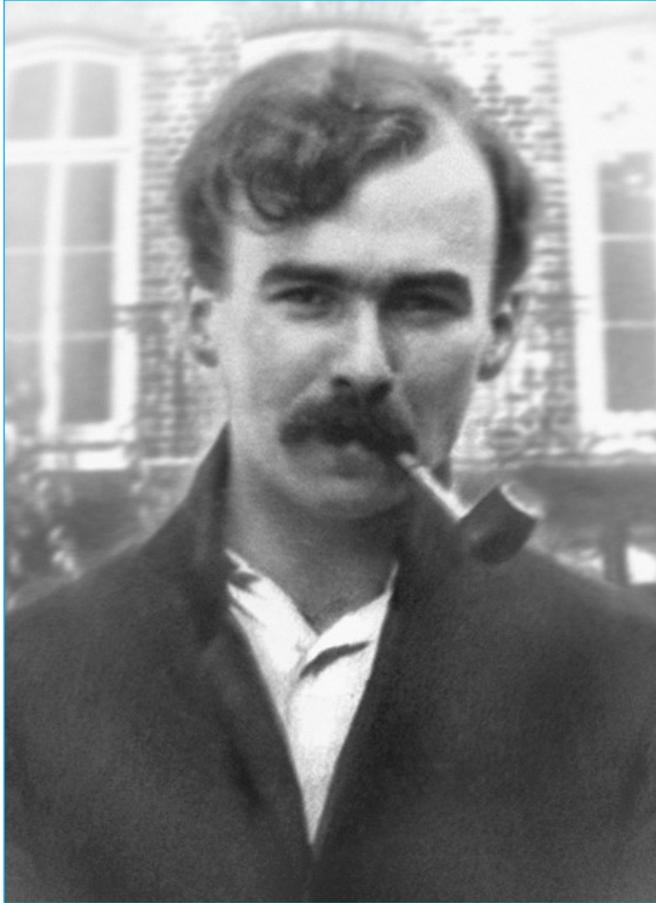
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1 M. Barlow, *Whom the Gods Love* (London, 1997).

2 I. Copley, *George Butterworth, A Centennial Tribute* (Inverness, 1985).

3 P. Leitch, 'Butterworth's Housman Re-Assessed: Lad Culture', *Musical Times*, 140 (1999), pp. 18-28.

4 M. Dawney, 'George Butterworth's Folk Music Manuscripts', *Folk Music Journal*, 3 (1976), pp. 99-113.



George Butterworth MC

Born London 12 July 1885, died 5 August 1916, Pozières, France



class and working-class did best: the circulation of the *Daily Express* grew from less than 0.5 million in 1910 to 2.5 million in 1939.<sup>5</sup> The *Times* grew slightly in circulation from 186,000 in 1930 to 191,000 in 1937,<sup>6</sup> and journals such as the *Musical Times* were influential despite their limited sales.<sup>7</sup> Read by the majority of the population, newspapers helped to form and express opinion on the most important issues of the day. They are, in this respect, a gateway through which we can take a glimpse at past society.

The Bodleian Library scrapbook compiled by George Butterworth's father, Sir Alexander Butterworth, includes letters from George Butterworth's school and university days, and the Trinity College Memorial Volume compiled in his memory holds a copy of Butterworth's war diary, both of which shed light on the context in which Butterworth lived. Both sources contain some reviews up to 1922, which supplemented the sample of around 275 articles I collected from the *Manchester Guardian (MG)*, the *Times*, the *Musical Times (MT)*, the *Musical Mirror*, the *Daily Express (DE)*, the *Daily Mirror (DM)*, the *Listener*, and the *Times Literary Supplement (TLS)* from around 1910 until around 1939. Unless otherwise indicated by reference codes, these articles were accessed through their respective online archives.

The varied titles were necessary in order to gauge how specialist journals, broadsheet newspapers, and tabloid newspapers reacted to Butterworth's music, and to measure the range of the population his music reached through live performance, published works, and radio broadcasts. How far the articles represent public opinion must be realistically assessed. Caution and careful analysis are vital in order to avoid attaching too much importance to links between comments made about the music, and similar but unrelated national and international developments.

Newspaper articles written about George Butterworth reveal the changing emotional connections between the audience and his music.

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5 A. Sutcliffe, 'Culture in the Scepter'd Isle', in C. Wrigley (ed.), *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2003), p. 489.

6 A. Thorpe, *Britain in the Era of the Two World Wars, 1914-45* (London, 1994), pp. 71-2.

7 A. Taylor, *English History: 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965), p. 310.



These sources show that Butterworth's music was part of an intense cultural rivalry before and during the Great War, as economic and imperial competitiveness shaped the way music was viewed. The latter stages of the Great War created a nation in mourning, which gathered around physical monuments and cultural symbols, such as Butterworth, as part of a mass grieving process. A reflective, sorrowful character in reviews became commonplace after 1916, conveying this period of mourning, and faded away after 1923. The Great War was also a catalyst for changes that had been developing over a much longer period of time. When, in the 1920s, it became clear that a superior post-war world had failed to emerge, the idea of 1914-1918 being a necessary sacrifice melted away. There was a shift in emphasis towards the performance of Butterworth's vocal settings of pastoral poetry, which used folk-songs for melodic influence. The nostalgic yearning for the pre-1914, pre-industrial world often present in other genres in the 1920s and 1930s is not prevalent in reviews of Butterworth's instrumental music.

Reviews tend to emphasise the quality of performance, and despair at the retained dominance of foreign works. Throughout the period these emotional connections interacted with the ever-present reality of music being a money-making business fraught with financial risk. There were also those who saw a distinction between cultural heritage and nationality, believing that music, as a form of art, is separate from national sentiment, and therefore the best music, rather than the best English music, must be performed for the preservation of high standards. Using the viable scope of articles relating to George Butterworth, it is clear that the nature of musical criticism is largely shaped by the surrounding social, political, and economic context. These articles shed light on the English musical world, and can at times show us the social and political concerns of the wider population in the early-twentieth century.

This article is divided into four chronological sections, which are sub-divided thematically. The first section uses Butterworth's letters from his time at university (1904-1908) and evidence from newspaper articles to identify the English musical context in which Butterworth composed. The second charts the reception of Butterworth's music during the period



1910-1916, comparing its reception either side of the outbreak of war in 1914. Section three evaluates the effect the Great War had on the way in which music critics, conductors, and audiences emotionally identified with Butterworth's music, as well as the reasons for this change between 1917 and 1923. The final section, covering the period 1924-1939, analyses the rise in popularity of Butterworth's songs, and the importance attached to the quality of the performance, and the nationality of the composer.

## George Butterworth's World

The prevailing characteristic of the musical world in which George Butterworth grew up was that it was dominated by foreign, primarily German, composers. In the realm of music, 'foreign' was synonymous with 'better'. A German musical education was essential to musicians serious about establishing a career for themselves in England. Butterworth's school friend 'Speyer of Eton' went up to Balliol College, Oxford in 1905 'after 2 years' studying in Germany'. The German musical education lived up to its reputation, and Speyer was soon 'performing a Beethoven sonata at the Balliol concert, with great success'.<sup>8</sup>

The programmes of the concerts Butterworth attended as a student convey the German dominance in the concert hall. In February 1906, despite Edward Elgar visiting Oxford, the real interest and 'only excitement of the week' was the Fritz Kreisler concert. A section from the London Symphony Orchestra played Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart's Symphony in E flat, which Butterworth referred to as 'a very old friend'.<sup>9</sup> In another letter to his parents, Brahms was Butterworth's choice of example of one who produced 'the highest art', and general musical musings of Butterworth's revolved around Bach's chorales, which 'seem to me the perfect thing, and

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8 George Butterworth to his parents, 30 October 1905, MS.Eng.c.3269; *Ibid*, 26 February 1906.

9 *Ibid*, 4 February 1906.

### Abbreviations:

MS.Eng.c.3269

MS.Eng.c.453

TCA

Bodleian Library Special Collections, MS. Eng. c. 3269

Bodleian Library Special Collections, MS. Eng. c. 453

Trinity College Archive, Oxford



it is a pity there are not many more'.<sup>10</sup> Concert halls around the country exhibited the same trend. In London, on 16 March 1912, the Queen's Hall Symphony Orchestra conducted by Henry Wood played a concert 'dedicated to Wagner', which included eight of his works. In Manchester, during April 1912, the Hallé Orchestra conducted by Walter Handel Thorley played Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Verdi, and Beethoven alongside two of the conductor's compositions.<sup>11</sup> The London Symphony Orchestra played Beethoven's eighth symphony, Brahms' second symphony, Bach's third Brandenburg Concerto, and Brahms' 'St Antonii' variations on 27 January 1913.<sup>12</sup> Some composers were so often played that previews of forthcoming concerts gave just the title of the work, relying on the reader to know who wrote it. The Saturday evening of the 1913 Leeds Musical Festival was dedicated to 'Elijah'; a work which it was assumed would be instantly recognisable to readers of the *Times* as being by Mendelssohn.<sup>13</sup> Any divergence from such well-established programmes was often received with suspicion. In Birmingham, Mr. Thomas Beecham shared his love of Russian music by conducting the Birmingham Philharmonic Society in Balakirev, Franck, Mozart, and Rimsky-Korsakov in 1913. The less well known Russian works 'did not specially appeal to the audience'.<sup>14</sup>

New, especially English, works seldom found the opportunity to break into the regular concert-hall programme due to the deteriorating financial viability of musical performance before 1914. Concerts were returning less in profit as audience figures steadily declined. The concert losses of the Manchester Society amounted to £600 in 1909-10, £1,066 in 1910-11, and £387 in 1911-12. It was reported that subscriptions had dropped from approximately £6,000 in 1905-6 to £4,600 in 1913, which was 'entirely due to the decrease in the number of subscribers for the highest-priced seats'. In this precarious financial situation the tendency was for works from established musical nations, rather than from 'Das Land ohne

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10 *Ibid*, 3 December 1905; *Ibid*, 26 February 1906.

11 *MT*, 1 March 1912, pp. 145-152.

12 *MT*, 1 March 1913, pp. 174-6, 182.

13 *Times*, 2 May 1913, p. 8.

14 *MT*, 1 January 1913, pp. 42-50.



Musik', to be played. At the last concert the programme consisted of music by the German composer Richard Strauss alongside Erich Korngold and Anton Bruckner, who were both Austrian.<sup>15</sup> The *Daily Express* regretted the financial reality facing the Leeds Musical Festival, and the fact that the committee replaced an English conductor with 'a foreigner'. But, it went on, 'funds are necessary' to the festival's 'salvation' and the only way to increase the number of receipts was by 'engaging artists whose names are financial assets'.<sup>16</sup> At Mr. Ellis' first concert of modern orchestral music, held at the Queen's Hall on 20 March 1914, the programme (which included Butterworth's *Rhapsody A Shropshire Lad*, and *The Banks of Green Willow*) 'ought to have drawn a better audience than it did'. Reluctant to attach too much significance to the small audience, the reviewer stated that Ellis' enterprise was one 'which we hope will gain fuller support from the public at the two concerts which take place next week', and planned a 'return to a further discussion of their achievements when the series is completed'.<sup>17</sup>

Diminishing attendance figures hit concert halls particularly potently during the time in which Butterworth's first performances were heard, because before the emergence of mass media exposure the potential audience for classical music was relatively small, and narrow in scope. Even the largest London concert halls were not that big; the Royal Albert Hall could seat 8,000, the Queen's Hall 3,000, and St James' Hall 2,000. The public concert was exclusive, and therefore drew support from a narrow social group. This meant the concert hall was particularly vulnerable to any change in that group's preferences; the suburban middle classes sought varied entertainment such as the theatre, music halls, luxury restaurants, supper rooms, and hotels, which provided intense competition for the concert hall.<sup>18</sup> In response, promoters were inclined to include old tried-and-tested favourites rather than risk a further decline in attendance by granting debut performances to the works of English composers.

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15 *Ibid.*

16 *DE*, 22 September 1913.

17 *Times*, 21 March 1914, p. 10.

18 A. Peacock & R. Weir, *The Composer in the Market Place* (London, 1975), pp. 37-9.



Dwindling subscription figures were only part of the financial problem, however. Writing in 1912, a journalist from the *Manchester Guardian* explained that orchestral concerts were 'much more expensive' than ten years ago. The cost of the orchestra for each concert rose from £105 in Sir Charles Hallé's day to £140 in 1912. Compounding this problem was the fact that orchestras grew in size to cope with the demands of newer works, the 'complexity' of which required 'more rehearsal time'. In the 1912 Manchester season, eight extra rehearsals were scheduled, costing £400, which according to the conductor Mr. Balling, was still not enough to maintain the highest standard of performance.<sup>19</sup> Such a climate affected the way in which Butterworth's music was experienced by the public, as the financial insecurities of the concert hall extended to all aspects of the music business, including publishing.

Between 1911 and 1913 Butterworth's choral music and art songs were first published, whereas his instrumental pieces, lacking the reputation of a name like Beethoven, Wagner, or Brahms, were neglected by publishers such as Augener and Novello. Before 1914, publishers allowed for a small number of high risk publications that might not make money, but relied on oratorio, musical comedy, music-hall, parlour songs, and simple piano and educational music to make steady sales, with Novello specialising in selling and hiring large numbers of parts to choral societies.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, Butterworth's *On Christmas Night All Christians Sing*, an unaccompanied variant on the well-known *Sussex Carol*, was published in 1912 by Augener, and the traditional harvest song *We get up in the morn*, also unaccompanied, was published in the same year. Both of these folk-song arrangements, along with a setting of a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson for female voices and piano called *In the Highlands* (also published in 1912), were published soon after being written, which suggests that they may have been composed with financial gain in mind. They were certainly published for it. The *Cycle of Six Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'* (1911), *Bredon Hill and Other Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'* (1912), and *Folk Songs from*

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<sup>19</sup> *MG*, 14 December 1912, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> S. Banfield, *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain* (6 vols, Oxford, 1995), vi, p. 45.



*Sussex* (1913) comprised Butterworth's art music published between 1911 and 1913. The *Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library* recorded the separate publication in 1913 of *Come, my own one*, the fifth song from *Folk Songs from Sussex*, which was evidently popular enough to sell by itself.<sup>21</sup>

The folk-revival, with which some of these works are connected, was bound up with an interest in the countryside, specifically the pastoral rural past. However, beneath such general interests lay division between Cecil Sharp, prominent among collectors of folk songs, and those who disagreed with his seemingly arbitrary distinction between genuine and false folk-tunes. For many who accepted Sharp's expertise and authority on ideas about the folk, engaging with what were believed to be unchanged folk-tunes from centuries past provided relief from an industrialised, commercial, degenerate world which was seen to have corrupted the national character.<sup>22</sup> In an article of 1913 about English song writers, including Butterworth, Rutland Boughton wrote that 'in these days of transition from the evils of industrialism and professionalism to the joys of a freed people, it is a glad sign that the natural music line of the folk-melody should be used again'.<sup>23</sup> Butterworth's music, making extensive use of folk-song, was in turn bound up with the ideas emerging from folk revivalists.

Butterworth's involvement with the folk-revival flourished during his time at university. In 1906 Butterworth wrote: 'I took tea yesterday with Vaughan Williams', and 'showed him our folk songs'. Keen to 'send them up to the Folk-song Society' and see them published, this interest of Butterworth's was an important step in his musical development.<sup>24</sup> Folk-song and dance provided him with the 'most delicious' and 'first rate' entertainment during one memorable display in the 'small Queen's Hall'. The emotional connection between the performers and the music

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21 L. Baillie (ed.), *The Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library to 1980* (62 vols, London, 1982), ix, pp. 295-6.

22 J. Francmanis, 'National Music to National Redeemer: The Consolidation of a 'Folk Song' Construct in Edwardian England', *Popular Music*, 21 (2002), pp. 9-20.

23 Memorial Volume, TCA, pp. 119-20.

24 George Butterworth to his parents, 10 October 1906, MS.Eng.c.3269.



Cecil Sharp's first morris side in 1912, l to r: D. N. Kennedy, George Butterworth, James Patterson, Perceval Lucas, A. Claud Wright and George Jerrard Wilkinson.  
*The English Folk Dance and Song Society*

was 'most refreshing', and inspired Butterworth to continue collecting songs, with the aim of saving enough to bring out a volume of the 'Folk Song journal on my own account'.<sup>25</sup> This interest in folk-song extended its influence, for Butterworth, to classical music. Ralph Vaughan Williams' friendship was vital in consolidating within Butterworth the idea that music, although cosmopolitan in appeal, must be national in its origin of inspiration, and folk-songs provided the ideal national stimulus.<sup>26</sup> Cecil Sharp, with whom Butterworth was also friends, held that 'training English musicians to lisp in the tongue of the foreigner can have no beneficial outcome'.<sup>27</sup> This was a Romantic nationalism which aimed to re-discover the lost sounds of the rural English past; a past uncorrupted by overgrown towns and a debilitated population. The contradictions of Cecil Sharp's theories on folk-song and the folk in general have been challenged and

25 *Ibid*, 29 April 1907.

26 R. Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford, 1987), pp. 62-73.

27 C. Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (London, 1907), p. 132.



the historiographical debate is ongoing,<sup>28</sup> but regardless of whether Sharp was right or wrong, the idea of harnessing a fresh musical idiom had a real and positive impact on English music. Vaughan Williams believed that folk-song gave Butterworth the 'freedom' to discover his own style, and 'throw off the fetters which hindered his earlier efforts'. Butterworth's relationship with folk-song was not simply one of imitation and alteration. Folk-song 'formed a nucleus which focussed his hitherto vague strivings'. Vaughan Williams' observation is telling, as some of Butterworth's most popular music, in particular the Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad*, exhibits the influence, rather than the direct use, of folk-song.<sup>29</sup>

The rural countryside provided for A. E. Housman what folk-song offered Butterworth. The idea of Shropshire enabled Housman, in *A Shropshire Lad*, to express Romantic pessimism in his clear, direct style. Housman's Shropshire was a county of the mind; he had not visited when he started writing about it, and subsequently some of his descriptions did not actually match the physical Shropshire countryside.<sup>30</sup> The idyllic pastoral atmosphere of Housman's verse celebrated landscapes that seemed to be disappearing in the early twentieth century. His presentation of themes such as love, sorrow, and death made his verse widely appealing, and the setting of Shropshire, like folk-song, fed a growing hunger for the idealised stability of the rural past in a world of imperial rivalry, uneasy peace, and rapid social change.<sup>31</sup> George Butterworth's musical compositions, connected to Housman's verse, were written at an intriguing point in history. The long-standing German dominance of the English concert hall was joined by a fresh force of folk-song revival which began to breathe new life into English classical music. The balance between these forces,

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28 G. Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester, 1993); J. Francmanis, 'National Music to National Redeemer: The Consolidation of a 'Folk Song' Construct in Edwardian England', pp. 1-25; R. Sykes, 'The Evolution of Englishness in the English Folksong Revival, 1900-1914', *Folk Music Journal*, 6 (1993), pp. 446-490.

29 Ralph Vaughan Williams to Alexander Butterworth, December 1917, MS.Eng.c.3269.

30 E. Firchow & B. Nügel (eds.), *Reluctant Modernists: Aldous Huxley and Some Contemporaries* (London, 2002), p. 8.

31 N. Page, *A. E. Housman: A Critical Biography* (London, 1996), p. 182.



and the ever-present financial considerations of musical performance, was slowly shifting.

## Early Reception and the Great War, 1910-1916

The early reception of Butterworth's music forged tangible links between the musical context and wider national and international developments. The folk revival was shaped by Cecil Sharp to address a series of social and cultural crises, including problems of public behaviour, commercialisation of culture, urbanisation, and war.<sup>32</sup> The dominance of German music in the English concert hall bred complex feelings of awe, wonder, and delight infused with jealousy, inferiority, and inadequacy. Imperial rivalry from 1871 saw international economic and political tensions played out in the musical arena, and English columnists felt the need to secure for England a musical identity of its own; an identity that could hold its own against German music.<sup>33</sup> In this climate of intense international rivalry, putting England on a musical par with Germany became an important aspect of journalism in the years before the outbreak of war. For a young musical nation like England, similarities with the great musical Germany were favourable and generous. In a review of Augener's publication of Butterworth's *Six Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad', Bredon Hill and Other Songs*, and *Eleven folk-songs from Sussex* the reviewer declared that Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* poems 'are an irresistible attraction for English composers as Heine's are for German composers'.<sup>34</sup> It is true that Butterworth, following Arthur Somervell, Vaughan Williams and other English composers, had begun to compose musical settings of Housman's poetry, but in 1914 suggesting that Housman commanded comparable interest to Heine was stretching the point. Robert Schumann, Franz Schubert, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Wolf, Richard Strauss, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner had all set Heine's verse to music by 1914, and Housman's verse

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32 V. Gammon, 'Cecil Sharp, Education and the Folk Dance Revival, 1899-1924', *Cultural and Social History*, 5 (2008), p. 94.

33 V. Gammon, 'Folk Song Collecting in Sussex and Surrey, 1843-1914', *History Workshop Journal*, 10 (1980), pp. 75-7.

34 *MT*, 1 June 1914, p. 388.



has not yet collected a comparable list of such prestigious composers. By associating these two poets and their influence on music, reviews such as these began to build and establish a musical reputation for Britain and, in particular, England.

The encouragement of England's musical reputation was characterised by commentary which focussed almost exclusively on the technical quality of English music. The same review held that Butterworth's settings expressed 'individuality', and showed 'classic grace and purity of form and outline'.<sup>35</sup> The same approach was taken by reviews of performances, which assessed the strengths as well as shortcomings of Butterworth's compositions, with tentative and sometimes excited expectation of what this young man may contribute to English music in the future. The *Times* noted the way in which 'the composer has caught the reckless mood of the words very happily' and applauded the 'pathetic suggestion of the last line' in *Is my team ploughing*. The *Morning Post* was unwilling to dwell in the present and impatiently claimed that this recital 'contained more promise of future success than proof of present attainment'.<sup>36</sup> Reaction to Butterworth's orchestral music was no different. In February 1912 a public classical concert was held in Oxford, at which Butterworth's *Two English Idylls* were heard. These works, according to the *Times*, were not yet quite 'sure in touch', but were 'of the highest promise' and exhibited 'great individuality of harmony and orchestration and a singularly fresh and subtle imaginativeness'.<sup>37</sup> In October 1913 his Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* was performed on the Thursday morning of the Leeds Musical Festival. The performance was 'excellently played and sympathetically received', and described by the correspondent for the *Times* as 'a charming little piece full of suggestive colouring'. The *Yorkshire Post* was similarly impressed with a score that showed 'no weak places', hailing Butterworth 'a musician of considerable accomplishment'. The *Daily Telegraph* emphasised the nature of the work as 'more of a promise than an actual achievement' and the *Morning Post* again felt that the 'imaginative and resourceful' music

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35 *Ibid.*

36 Memorial Volume, TCA, p. 109.

37 *Times*, 10 February 1912, p. 10.



was 'chiefly remarkable for its promise of development in due course'.<sup>38</sup> Through an accumulation of such reviews the musical reputation of Butterworth, and consequently the musical reputation of English music, began to grow.

As well as an expectation of what the future Butterworth could offer English music, the emotional relationship between the reviewer and Butterworth's music before the outbreak of war was one of delight and happiness. The programme of Mr. F. B. Ellis' concert of modern orchestral music on 20 March 1914 contained the Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* and *The Banks of Green Willow*, which both 'gracefully' developed 'the poetic feeling of the beautiful melodies', and a critic from the *Daily Mail* found the performance 'charming'.<sup>39</sup> Although it would be anachronistic to suggest that people in Edwardian England saw themselves as part of an age of innocence soon to be lost, the use of such words encapsulates the minds of people whose experience with Butterworth's music seemed much less reflective and sombre. Not all golden memories of this period are accurate, and urban squalor had concerned social investigators since the 1880s, but it is notable that a society which had experienced a century of peace and had been infused with the ideas of 'progress'<sup>40</sup> subsequently failed to engage with the feelings of futility, the death of youth, sorrow, and irony overflowing from Butterworth's compositions.

The balance between the competing mentalities in Edwardian England regarding classical music was shifted by the outbreak of war. The poet Edward Thomas travelled around England in 1914 recording the various reactions to war, which ranged from patriotism to indifference.<sup>41</sup> What is clear from Thomas' observations is that there was no unified war cry from the population. However, the military division between Britain and Germany was to some extent replicated culturally, as composers from allied nations stood to benefit from many concert programmes that catered

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38 Memorial Volume, TCA, pp. 110-3.

39 *Ibid*, pp. 114-6.

40 P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975), p. 8.

41 M. Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (London, 2011), pp. 162-3.



for those who saw Germany as the cultural enemy.

At the outbreak of war, the total number of concerts declined, and references to Butterworth are subsequently lower in number until his death in 1916. Of those concerts that were organised, many were patriotic and conscious of wartime divisions, and often made up of English or allied music. In Bournemouth, one of the three 'Monday Specials' concerts was devoted to Russian and Slavonic composers, one to French, and one to British.<sup>42</sup> Such concerts were 'extremely popular', as music was expected to play its role by raising morale at home.<sup>43</sup> The 'Music in Wartime Committee' protected the interests of British music. Several orchestras, hotels, and restaurants fired German and Austrian musicians.<sup>44</sup> Newspapers encouraged the depiction of Germany as the cultural, as well as military, enemy, and projected the idea of Germany as the aggressor, taking advantage of vulnerable neighbours like Belgium. Such images, and consistent use of language depicting victimised nations and civilians, meant that by 1915 large sections of the population saw the fault for the war as lying with Germany,<sup>45</sup> and consequently refused to listen to German music. For some, even making money was less important than the nationality of performed music. The English composer Arthur Bliss, whose musical education was interrupted by the war, wrote in to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in order to praise 'Edwin Evans and "Musicus" for their championship of English music'. For him, the military fight on the continent should be fought culturally 'against the predominating influence of Germany at home'. Bliss found it 'unseemly that a fine institution like

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42 *MT*, 1 June 1916, pp. 299-303.

43 G. Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 133; J. Crump, 'The Identity of British Music: The Reception of Elgar, 1898-1935' in R. Colls and P. Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (1987), p. 171; R. Mackay, 'Being Beastly to the Germans: Music, Censorship and the BBC in World War II', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 20 (2000), pp. 513-525; R. Mackay, 'Leaving Out the Black Notes: The BBC and Enemy Music in the Second World War', *Media History*, 6 (2000), pp. 75-80.

44 G. Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, p. 134.

45 A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 68.



the London Symphony Orchestra should have to put its financial security in front of its national feelings'.<sup>46</sup> Such opinions did not go unheard. Nineteen works new to the Promenade concerts were introduced during the 1917 season, among which nine were British (including Butterworth's Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad*), five were Russian, two were Spanish, and one work each was from France, Finland, and America.<sup>47</sup> The patriotism of Bliss represented the feelings of swathes of the classical music-listening population.

Competing with national sentiment was the idea that art and music were separate from military conflict, and that music should be performed and promoted based purely on its quality. In late 1915, the first part of the Promenade season experienced 'varying fortune as regards audiences', but it was 'evident that there is no general reluctance to listen to Wagner's music or to the works of the "classic" composers, even of the Teutonic brand'.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the 1917 season often surrounded the new British works with old favourites; Butterworth's Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* was performed alongside works by Weber, Mozart, and Berlioz.<sup>49</sup> What emerged was an environment in which German music still maintained its headline status, yet its choking effect on new British works receded. The link between the war and music was reflected in Butterworth's involvement as both a composer of English music and a soldier in the British army. The *Musical Times* conveyed this link to its readers in its 'Musicians in the Army' column in the early stages of the war. This noted Butterworth's service in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry,<sup>50</sup> and articles in general made increasing reference to 'Lieutenant' Butterworth's music.<sup>51</sup> The war was thus important culturally, acting as a vital force in loosening Germany's grasp on music in England, and encouraging the independence of English musical life.

Butterworth's war diary and letters relay the monotony and boredom

46 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 October 1916, MS.Eng.c.453.

47 *Times*, 3 August 1917, p. 9.

48 *MT*, 1 October 1915, p. 619.

49 *Times*, 3 September 1917, p. 1.

50 *MT*, 1 November 1914, pp. 659-60.

51 *MT*, 1 September 1916, p. 411.



of the trenches and belittle the perils of war, which perhaps reflects the contemporary, and traditional, public school values of self-sacrifice and chivalry.<sup>52</sup> Having been in the fire-trenches three times, 'twenty-fours at a stretch', he had seen 'only one shell burst', and had not yet seen a dead man, a wounded man, a German, or a gun. His account of war in late 1915 records the experiences which live in modern memory: having to occupy the trenches through rain, snow, and 'MUD', although it was only the latter that seemed to dampen Butterworth's spirits. Trench living did not seem to bother him that much: 'I slept excellently each night I was in', and 'I was able to get a decent amount of rest'. Despite not seeing much action, the fighting was always nearby. Butterworth noted that 'we hear the artillery at work practically all the time'. He seemed to take the situation in good humour, writing that 'usually it is simply a gun or two trying to annoy somebody'. On the odd occasion that there was a 'concentrated "strafe" for half-an-hour or so', Butterworth and his fellow soldiers 'all sit up and wonder if someone is trying an attack'. The constant danger of sudden death seemed matter-of-fact rather than psychologically damaging: 'and of course there is always a chance that we may be shelled ourselves. But no one minds that.'<sup>53</sup>

In 1916 Butterworth was exposed to more action and a greater degree of danger. Despite this, his acceptance of his situation did not seem to change. After the War Office sent a telegram to Butterworth's parents reporting their son as 'wounded', he soon wrote home, on 27 July 1916, dismissing his experience with a small fragment of shrapnel as 'a slight scratch'.<sup>54</sup> Rather than belittling the horrific experience of the trenches, the deafening noise, the dreadful conditions, the proximity of death, the explosions that left men twitching and wincing in later life, Butterworth's diary portrays the war as a necessary sacrifice. The questions about the war's validity, and doubts about its honour raised by many veterans writing

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52 P. Jalland, *Death in War and Peace* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 15-16.

53 War diary, 18 September 1915, Memorial Volume, TCA, pp. 54-6; War letter, 20 September 1915, *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7; War letter, 14 November 1915, p. 64.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 78.



their memoirs in the 1920s shaped the nation's memory of the Great War,<sup>55</sup> but in Butterworth's case these were not part of his immediate reaction to the conflict. Ideas of patriotism and chivalric sacrifice pervaded the wider population, which meant that Butterworth's music was understood through its charm, its melodies, and its technical quality. From 1916 however, after the war had smashed these pillars of Edwardian discourse, Butterworth's music was comprehended in tremendously different ways, revolving around ideas of pointless war, sacrifice of youth, and the regret of unfulfilled promise.

### Mourning the 'Lost Generation', 1916-1923

The Great War was a powerful upheaval that devastated 'the old belief of nineteenth-century Europe in the progressive power of man to control his destinies',<sup>56</sup> and aligned the experiences of virtually the whole population. Perhaps 3 million people in a country of less than 42 million lost a close relative, son or brother. The secondary bereaved, who mourned the loss of a colleague, friend, cousin, or neighbour, encompassed the entire population. This was compounded by 200,000 Spanish flu fatalities in England and Wales soon after peace was signed. The middle classes had higher enlistment rates in 1914 and 1915, and most became officers, whose casualty rates were twice those of their men.<sup>57</sup>

In 1918, the *Times* recalled David Lloyd George's defence of the Eisteddfod during the summer of 1916, when he asked 'Why should we not sing during the war?' In his view, 'sweet song is a song of triumph over pain'.<sup>58</sup> But rather than curing pain and acting as a distraction, Butterworth's music was part of the wider social process of mourning. This encompassed nostalgia for the pre-war, even pre-industrial world, and the idea of Butterworth as a representative tragic figure, who had sacrificed his promising musical career for what seemed a worthy but was in fact a futile cause. The enthusiasm and keen expectation of what Butterworth would go

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55 P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 29-30.

56 *MG*, 1 December 1920, p. 7.

57 *Ibid*, pp. 31-6.

58 *Times*, 28 December 1918, p. 9.



on to achieve was smashed by his death at the Somme, which represented the broken hopes of the lost generation. In this way Butterworth as a tragic figure, and his tragic music, was widely identified on an emotional level from 1917. This was not because each reviewer or letter-writer was personally close to him, but because after the suffering of the Great War, anyone who came into contact with Butterworth's story could acutely relate to the projected image of him as one cut off from greater achievement. Just like Housman's Shropshire, Butterworth's potential musical greatness was imagined, and existed in the mind. In reality, Butterworth's production of music had been irregular and stilted, and there had been no guarantee that he would shine as a leading light in the English musical renaissance. Perceptions of Butterworth tell us more about those who formed them and identified with them, than they tell us about Butterworth himself.

The reaction to Butterworth's death centred on his life cut short, and his unfulfilled potential. He was 'only thirty years old', and despite having achieved 'many things', 'greater were expected'.<sup>59</sup> This was the typical press coverage of Butterworth's death, focussing on his achievements as signs of a brighter future, not only for Butterworth personally but for the English musical nation as a whole. He was a man of 'great promise' who 'would undoubtedly have done much to further a national ideal of musical art in this country', had he not 'given his life in a greater cause'.<sup>60</sup> Another young Oxford musician, F. S. Kelly of Balliol, was remembered on the same terms as Butterworth and linked to him, as a musician 'of the younger generation' who was destined 'to contribute to the renaissance of English music', when the war cut short his, and Butterworth's, 'expanding power'.<sup>61</sup> Lieutenant Reginald Tiddy of University College, Oxford died, like Butterworth, in August at the Somme. He was 'closely connected' with Butterworth and Cecil Sharp in taking forward the folk-song and dance movement.<sup>62</sup> One in four Oxford and Cambridge men under the age of 25 died in the Great War, which along with the high officer casualty

59 *MG*, 23 August 1916, p. 4.

60 *MT*, 1 September 1916, p. 411.

61 *Times*, 31 May 1927, p. 14.

62 *MT*, 1 October 1916, p. 458.



rates, meant that the idea of the 'lost generation' was particularly apt for this class.<sup>63</sup>

Understanding of the pre-war world altered in the aftermath of death. Lucy Broadwood's emotional letter written to Sir Alexander Butterworth captured the mood which inhabited the minds of those who had witnessed not just the disruption of an English musical revival, but the decimation of a generation. Broadwood felt that 'the pre-war compositions of our younger composers' seem 'like something prophetic of the present tragedy of the world'. Stress, turmoil, 'the sound of battle, the fateful, solemn, marches, the call of trumpets, the pathos of the quiet church-yard, and the triumph of the spiritual' were recognised as 'so strangely and movingly present in nearly all that they have written'.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the larger proportional loss of certain sections in society, an inclusive, national community of the bereaved was facilitated by memorials, which quickly became popular as focal points within villages and towns, helping the bereaved to mourn and ultimately disengage from the dead.<sup>65</sup>

Butterworth was remembered in memorials including those at Thiepval, Deerpark (where Butterworth's grandfather had been Vicar), the Royal College of Music, and Radley College, where Butterworth had taught.<sup>66</sup> Although perhaps only a small part of the total commemoration activity,<sup>67</sup> the nature of a memorial as a visible monument encompassing the shared feelings of a wider community reflected the way in which Butterworth's music became part of the mourning process. The *Times* claimed that the whole country felt 'to be in a larger sense prisoners of war', which affected culture: 'Library statistics tell us that poetry has never been read so much as during the war'. Although it may seem strange that music could find a place 'in a world turned topsy-turvy', there was in 1916

63 P. Jalland, *Death in War and Peace*, pp. 35-6.

64 Lucy Broadwood to Sir Alexander Butterworth, 24 May 1918, MS.Eng.c.3269.

65 J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 113-5; A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p. 257.

66 M. Barlow, *Whom the Gods Love* pp. 20, 132, 135; *Musical Times*, 1 December 1922, p. 872.

67 A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, pp. 261-2.



'a steady flow of about two good concerts a day, with all the undercurrents of music that this implies'. The wider population, at least those interested in reading poetry and listening to classical music, developed more intimate personal connections with works of art that expressed loss, sorrow, and death. Such themes were supplied by composers like Vaughan Williams, Henry Walford Davies, and George Butterworth.<sup>68</sup> In 1919 *The Banks of Green Willow* was described as 'less personal' in emotion than the Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad*, whereas before 1916 none of Butterworth's music was engaged with in personal terms.<sup>69</sup>

On 6 September 1917, at the Queen's Hall Promenade concert, Butterworth's Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* was interpreted by those who heard it as particularly 'British' sounding music. Synonymous with this definition were images of picturesque countryside and images of nature, which had hitherto been a neglected aspect of Butterworth's pastoral compositions:

The haze and heat of a spring day, the fragrance of the bloom, the beauty of life on such a day, all seem in this music, a most worthy example of the great talent of a musical son this land, now 'gone west' ere his prime.<sup>70</sup>

The Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* conveyed 'a sense of stored-up impressions of pastoral England in which love and tenderness are blended in the mellow light of memory'.<sup>71</sup> The *Morning Post* declared that 'Lieut. Butterworth's melodic idiom has the outstanding merit of being British'. The *Pall Mall Gazette* defined this 'British' sound as the 'English flavour' gained from the folk-song idiom. Such an influence made the music 'pastoral', 'meditative', and tinged with the same 'peculiar sadness' that is 'so fascinating' in Housman's poetry. Images of nature were infused with the sadness of his shortened life, which encouraged reflections on Butterworth's promise as an English composer with 'no possibility of its

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68 *Times*, 2 December 1916, p. 11.

69 *Times*, 1 September 1919, p. 8.

70 Memorial Volume, TCA, pp. 116-8.

71 *Birmingham Post*, 22 December 1919, MS.Eng.c.453.



fulfilment':<sup>72</sup> The Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad's* 'deep feeling for the English countryside' was 'beautifully understood' by George Butterworth, shown through the 'undercurrent of rustic melancholy' in his music.<sup>73</sup>

Rather than 'delightful' or 'cheerful', the music was now 'picturesque' and brought to mind 'Daintiness, bloom and beauty: the beauty of a warm spring day', all the things which make up a 'British atmosphere' conveyed through 'British melody'. Performance reviews which before 1916 had been so emotionless, so intent on forging a serious musical reputation for England, were from 1916 overcome with sadness when addressing Butterworth's promise which 'alas! can never be fulfilled'.<sup>74</sup> In 1921 Mr. Charles Neville sang 'the Housman songs of George Butterworth', which oozed 'poignancy of expression' and 'tenderness that brings the thought of flowers', bringing to mind the 'beauty and fragility' of humanity.<sup>75</sup> The England in the minds of these reviewers was conspicuously pastoral. The longing for such a place was a result of long term economic industrialisation and the short term horrors of industrialised warfare, which had thrust forth the image of pastoral England's antithesis. When Paul Nash recovered from the injuries he suffered in the trenches, he painted what he had seen in Flanders; namely a ravaged, brutalised, murdered landscape which had been ruined by mechanised warfare, apparent in *Rain: Lake Zillebeke* of 1918.<sup>76</sup> The *Morning Post* declared that Butterworth's music, on the other hand, established 'the true atmosphere of England, of rural England, the real England'.<sup>77</sup> Butterworth's 'purely English mind' drew its 'main nourishment' from 'English scenery, English literature, and the purest English music of the past'.<sup>78</sup> His music 'breathes the very soul of the English nation at its best'.<sup>79</sup>

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72 Memorial Volume, TCA, pp. 116-8.

73 *DM*, 28 June 1919, MS.Eng.c.453.

74 Memorial Volume, TCA, pp. 116-8.

75 *MG*, 2 April 1921, p. 10.

76 D. Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War* (London, 2009), pp. 274-5.

77 *Morning Post*, 1 September 1919, MS.Eng.c.453.

78 *MG*, 17 September 1919, MS.Eng.c.453.

79 *Globe*, 1 September 1919, MS.Eng.c.453.



The reception of Butterworth's music developed in the same way all over England. After a performance of *Rhapsody A Shropshire Lad* at the Hallé concerts in Manchester, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that Butterworth 'broods with an exquisitely tender regret on the sheaf of homely melodies which were fated to be almost the whole harvest of his too short life'.<sup>80</sup> The *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent at the Brand Lane concerts described the *Rhapsody* as 'poignant, delicate, and intense',<sup>81</sup> 'poignant' and 'tender' became the preferred adjectives used to describe the music during the period 1916-1923.<sup>82</sup> The increased relevance of Butterworth's musical messages led the *Musical Standard* to proclaim that the *Rhapsody A Shropshire Lad* was a 'national treasure'.<sup>83</sup> Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* also seemed to benefit from the increased relevance of its themes.

As Butterworth became more widely known, it is natural that publishers would show more interest in publishing his works. A setting of Shelley's *I fear thy kisses* was published in 1919, with settings of R. L. Stevenson's *I will make you brooches* and Oscar Wilde's *Requiescat* following a year later. *Bredon Hill* was re-published by Augener in 1920, and Novello published *Love blows as the wind blows*, a set of four untitled songs from W. E. Henley's *Echoes*, in 1921. Butterworth's instrumental works were also published in this period, the first being the *Rhapsody A Shropshire Lad* in 1917, which remained the most frequently performed of all his works throughout the inter-war years. *The Banks of Green Willow* was published in 1919, and *Two English Idylls* followed in 1920.<sup>84</sup> This surge in publication, coupled with Adrian Boult's recording of the *Rhapsody A Shropshire Lad* (released by HMV in 1921),<sup>85</sup> reflected a wider cultural shift, also reflected in the painted arts which moved away from modernism after the Great War and towards a return to the traditional and the pastoral in

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80 *MG*, 11 April 1919, p. 12.

81 *MG*, 27 November 1922, p. 9.

82 *MG*, 22 January, 1921, p. 11.

83 *Musical Standard*, 16 March 1918, MS.Eng.c.453.

84 L. Baillie (ed.), *The Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library to 1980*, ix, 295-6.

85 M. Barlow, *Whom the Gods Love*, p. 173



an 'understandable desire for tranquillity'.<sup>86</sup>

This period witnessed a sharp increase in the total number of Butterworth concerts and recitals reviewed in newspapers, suggesting a general increase in the performance of English music. That the increased frequency of performance owes much to the growth of Butterworth's reputation is irrefutable, but the change in the emotional connection between audience and music is equally undeniable. Subsequently, concert programmes loaded with English works and published scores of English music became financially viable. For example, Sir Henry Wood conducted twenty new works during the 1921 Queen's Hall season, ten of which, including *Two English Idylls* 'by the late George Butterworth', were from British composers.<sup>87</sup> The increased popularity of English music was reflected in popular literature. In the serialised story *The Mystery Husband* by A. J. Russell, published in the *Daily Mirror* in 1923, Eve Sturdee manages her husband's business at home. After a concert which was 'expected to show a profit of at least thirty pounds, showed an adverse balance of fifty', Sturdee is moved to cancel a similar concert arranged for the next week. However, after mentioning to an 'influential' daily newspaper a forthcoming concert at which 'only English music will be played', the conversation moves with 'renewed interest' onto the 'ever-green subject of English composers and their compositions'. The 'widely-circulated newspaper' advertises the forthcoming concert, and there is 'not an empty seat in the Hall on the following Friday' as the profit amounts to £250.<sup>88</sup> This story is revealing because of the newspaper's obsession with providing content that would engage and entertain (in this case female) readers across the nation and ultimately boost circulation.

In the immediate post-war years, the preoccupation with musical standards in England seemed to shift slightly from the composer to the performer. The *Manchester Guardian's* special correspondent at the Blackpool Musical Festival of 1922 was disappointed with the standard of

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86 D. Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War*, pp. 307-8.

87 *Times*, 22 July 1921, p. 8.

88 *DM*, 12 March 1923, p. 15.



the baritones who sang Butterworth's *Is my team ploughing*. Many baritones exhibited 'resonant tone' in the Silver Rose Bowl Contest, but nine out of ten made 'a fearfully lugubrious matter of the music'. Spiritless singing was, in the correspondent's opinion, 'a sin surely against high art'.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, the idea that art should never be constrained by nationalist sentiment underlay the more dominant idea of an English musical renaissance. One writer in the *Observer* argued that 'Mr. Holst, if he feels like it, is quite justified' if he wrote 'an English suite on native Japanese airs. The only thing that matters is whether the writing is good or bad; and Mr. Holst's happens to be particularly good'.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the increased programming of British compositions throughout the Great War, as early as 1918 there were those who were left dissatisfied and called for a greater proportion of concert programmes to be devoted to native work. An article in the *Times* deplored 'the Press', which believed that 'British music is worthless' and that 'to play British works is to empty a concert room'. This commentator believed that audiences were cold to these works 'not as much as because they are British' but 'because they are new'. The answer was to play them more often, and so 'Don't let them be new'. All that British composers got 'as a rule' was a first performance and no more. Consequently, as a musical people, 'we have for the moment lost our first wind and have not yet got our second'. A grim picture of the state of native music in Britain was depicted by a minority of dissatisfied, impatient, commentators. But the frequency of performances of Butterworth's music, coupled with the majority of reception in the newspapers, tells a different story. The very same article immediately proceeded to recognise that 'Last night' the London Symphony Orchestra, under Mr. A. C. Boult, 'gave us the first of an enterprising series of concerts' giving the British public the opportunity of 'hearing their own composers.' Vaughan Williams' *A London Symphony* was performed alongside Butterworth's *Rhapsody A Shropshire Lad*.<sup>91</sup> The impatient recognition of the upward curve in the popularity of English

89 *MG*, 20 October 1922, p. 14.

90 *Observer*, 7 September 1919, p. 7 MS.Eng.c.453.

91 *Times*, 9 February 1918, p. 9.



music was soured by the retained influence of 'Teutonic' works.

## Rural England and the Modern World, 1924-1939

The development of the radio forged a wider audience for various types of music. By 1937, 68.5% of the population were estimated to be able to listen,<sup>92</sup> and Britain had 9 million radio set licenses issued by 1939, bought mostly by people earning modest incomes.<sup>93</sup> Butterworth's music had a wider potential audience through the wireless, but classical music still had to compete with jazz and popular music, which catered to the tastes of the majority. Increased purchasing power, coupled with the emotional and material strains of war, generated demand for popular entertainment in the 1920s, especially among the young.<sup>94</sup> By 1939, 23 million people attended 5,000 cinemas each week, with some 990 million tickets sold that year. New fashions and a larger consumer market meant that the competition for products intensified, and bitter rivalry ensued amongst the 'circulation-getter' newspapers, which dedicated space to celebrity gossip, advertisement, crime, and sport.<sup>95</sup> In consequence, Butterworth received much less coverage in the popular press than in the broadsheet newspapers. Whereas in 1929 the *Manchester Guardian* gave details of the upcoming Promenade performance of Butterworth's *The Banks of Green Willow*,<sup>96</sup> the *Daily Mirror* gave no such detail. Instead, the small notification of the Promenade season was surrounded by adverts for kitchen cleaner, hair tonic, and skin cream, and headings such as 'Many Dead in Typhoon' and 'Captives released'.<sup>97</sup> Although general debate over English classical music flowed in the popular press, there were relatively few references to Butterworth in particular, and the extent of his popular audience was almost certainly very narrow.

Swimming against the tide of commercial culture and decreasing

92 A. Thorpe, *Britain in the Era of the Two World Wars*, pp. 71-2

93 E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremities* (London, 1994), p. 195

94 M. Pugh, 'We Danced All Night': *A Social History of Britain between the Wars*, p. 217

95 A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. 55

96 *MG*, 30 July 1929, p. 12

97 *DM*, 6 September 1929, p. 20



profits were attempts to locate a wider public for 'highbrow' art. In 1924 the Rochdale Corporation put on ten cheap concerts costing sixpence for ticket and programme, made possible by private funding and free use of the Town Hall. Butterworth's *Is my team ploughing*, *Bredon Hill*, and *Requiescat* were included alongside three Beethoven items, and music by Brahms, Bantock, Elgar, Tchaikovsky, Chopin, Liszt, Schubert, Brahms, Debussy, Fauré, and Vaughan Williams in programmes that were met with 'immense enthusiasm'. In the hall, seating 975, average attendance numbered 920, proving that 'the finest music may be offered without hesitation to a "popular" audience'. The 'entire loss' was over £78, but the prior financial arrangement made the concerts viable, and word of the concerts 'spread throughout the North of England', with many enquiries received 'as to the details of finance and management'.<sup>98</sup> The radio was also utilised for this purpose by the BBC and John Reith, who became director general in 1927. Compton Mackenzie defended the BBC's monopoly over the radio as the best means of securing high quality programmes,<sup>99</sup> and the famous contralto Dame Clara Butt believed the wireless would create 'a vast new body of intelligent listeners'.<sup>100</sup> For example, at the Wireless Station in 1924, J. P. Russell organised a 'historical' series of concerts from English vocal music which included George Parker singing the 'exquisite' and 'poignant' songs of Butterworth and Ireland. In 1936 Ellis Roberts' radio programme broadcast Handel, Bach, and Mendelssohn alongside Sullivan, Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and George Butterworth.<sup>101</sup> Initiatives such as these, coupled with the development of Butterworth song recitals from 'unique' in 1916,<sup>102</sup> to commonplace and 'better known' in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>103</sup> furthered what was seen by the critic 'S. L.' as the wider process of the 'vitalisation' of English song.<sup>104</sup>

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98 *MT*, 1 June 1924, pp. 508-9

99 D. Lemahieu, 'The Gramophone: Recorded Music and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the War', *Technology and Culture*, 23 (1982), p. 387

100 A. Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford, 1985), p. 123

101 *MG*, 25 January 1926, p. 12

102 *MT*, 1 May 1916, pp. 251-7

103 *MG*, 19 June 1926, p. 15

104 *MG*, 18 July 1924, p. 11



From 1924 'folk-song, in its simple state or as a basis for choral music', became a feature of competitive festivals, and the 'folk-dance' was 'steadily making for itself a similar place'. The 'popularity with the audience' of these forms was an exciting development, especially when 'an unexpected result was the tapping of a large new public'.<sup>105</sup> Butterworth's songs became a popular choice for festival competitions. Thus, in 1922, the Blackpool Musical Festival's involvement of sixty-four baritones who sang Butterworth's cycle from Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*.<sup>106</sup> In the same year, the British Empire Music Festival was inaugurated with the aim to 'encourage and revive public interest in British music'.<sup>107</sup> The Lytham Music Festival in 1933 fused the performance of classical song composers such as Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms with English folk-song composers like Butterworth, Vaughan Williams, and Cecil Sharp.<sup>108</sup> In 1934, the Lytham St. Anne's Music Festival assigned one British composer to each class of voice, and the tenors were given Butterworth.<sup>109</sup> The popularity of these festivals fluctuated, often linked to the offer of cash prizes. At the 1928 Barnsley festival entries fell from 442 to 346 after it was decided that no money prizes would be offered, and there was also a marked decrease in the number of choir entries in Carlisle, Chester-le-Street, Devonshire, and Mansfield.<sup>110</sup>

The aspects of Butterworth's music associated with folk-song were highlighted in various reviews of professional performances, too. A critic from the *Times* emphasised that the 'folksong characters' of Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* settings must 'never be forgotten'.<sup>111</sup> Likewise, the *Musical Times* enthusiastically reviewed John McKenna's performance in 1936 of some folk-songs, with Butterworth's *Come, my own one* the 'best of all'.<sup>112</sup> Other programmes exclusively revolved around folk song, such as Muriel

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105 *MT*, 1 August 1924, pp. 689-90

106 *MT*, 1 October 1922, p. 741

107 *DM*, 5 November 1922, p. 3

108 *MG*, 15 June 1933, p. 12

109 *MG*, 14 June 1934, p. 7

110 *MT*, 1 April 1928, pp. 358-61

111 *Times*, 1 July 1919, p. 10

112 *MT*, 1 February 1926, pp. 132-4



Nixon's afternoon concert at the Æolian Hall in 1925, which contained two of Lucy Broadwood's folk-song arrangements, two by Sharp, one by Vaughan Williams, and *The True Lover's Farewell* and *Come, my own one* arranged by Butterworth.<sup>113</sup>

Many people invested in the idea that, through folk-culture an older, nobler, truer England could be stirred. This 'imagined community' became a powerful tool for national identity,<sup>114</sup> and was part of a general reaction against modern society's commercialism, urban degeneration, and international distrust. Writing in the *Daily Express*, Helen Swaffer complained that films and gramophones were 'Americanising' the world, and 'destroying the traditional beauties of our country'.<sup>115</sup> As more people witnessed the countryside through rambling, hiking, and cycling, the national rural image was captured by Stanley Baldwin when he said that 'To me, England is the country, and the country is England',<sup>116</sup> and George Orwell further recognised the correlation between agricultural decline and idealised countryside in his review of *The Way of a Countryman* by Sir William Beach Thomas.<sup>117</sup> The general cultural picture is often characterised by anthologists' collections of eighteenth-century verse, tourists pausing in lay-bys to consult newly written guidebooks, Paul Nash's megaliths, Graham Sutherland's landscapes, Edward Bawden's copper jelly moulds, Bill Brandt's photographs of literary Britain, and Florence White's regional recipes.<sup>118</sup>

But not everyone who felt anxiety about urban degeneration, world war, or commercial culture turned to folk song, and those who did were part of a gradual process, as folk-culture remained unfamiliar to most. The All-England Folk Festival of Folk Song and Dance of 1927 attracted 900

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113 *Times*, 12 October 1925, p. 14

114 T. Hajikowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 5-6

115 *DE*, 13 September 1928, p. 8

116 A. Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England' in R. Colls & P. Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (1987), pp. 82-4

117 G. Orwell, 'Review of *way of a Countryman* by Sir William Beach Thomas', in J. Carey, *George Orwell Essays* (London, 2002), pp. 567-70

118 A. Harris, *Romantic Moderns* (London, 2010), pp. 7-10



people, and the programme consisted of many songs and dances collected and transcribed by George Butterworth. Many people were 'acquainted for the first time with the songs and dances', and the folk-singing suffered from 'ignorance of the songs on the part of the audience'.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, reception of Butterworth's recital and concert hall music largely contradicts the supposed general cultural yearning for a pre-1914 world. Apart from Sir Hugh Allen's reference to Butterworth as 'one of the most talented' sons of Oxford 'who had fallen in the War' before performing *The Banks of Green Willow* and a short cycle of three songs at the 1930 Oxford Festival,<sup>120</sup> allusions to Butterworth's death and lack of fulfilment were rare between 1924 and 1939. References to the countryside and picturesque images were similarly unusual, barring one review which described the *Rhapsody A Shropshire Lad* as a 'piece of watercolour music'.<sup>121</sup>

Instead, reviews focussed on the technical quality of the performance, and bemoaned the lack of native talent allowed onto programmes. Performing Butterworth's songs at Wigmore Hall in 1919, the voice of Mr. Johnstone-Douglas was 'too much studied' and lacked 'spontaneity of effect',<sup>122</sup> whereas John McKenna's performance in 1936 'found the apt lilt' for them.<sup>123</sup> Some support for English music seemed to attempt to exaggerate its standard when compared with foreign works. Under the headings 'Fine English Music' and 'Native Composers' Triumph at Queen's Hall', the English music on show at the Queen's Hall Promenade Concert in 1927 was pronounced 'predominant and triumphant'. The performance of Bax's music was 'competent rather than inspired', yet it somehow 'completely overshadowed the well-worn Tchaikovsky and Grieg with which it shared the programme'.<sup>124</sup> Sir Thomas Beecham shared this expectation of Britain as a deserving leader among musical nations in 1928, when he protested that Great Britain had deteriorated 'immeasurably'

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119 *MG*, 3 January 1927, p. 14

120 *Times*, 10 May 1930, p. 10

121 *MG*, 25 October 1926, p. 11

122 *Times*, 1 July 1919, p. 10

123 *MT*, 1 February 1936, pp. 132-4

124 *DE*, 22 August 1927, p. 3



over the last twenty-five years, and English orchestras which 'used to take rank with the best in the continent' had lowered their standards.<sup>125</sup> From this competitive thinking emerged headings such as 'Battle for British Music', utilising the words of warfare in a cultural sense. Complaints of the lack of English music, especially at the Promenade concerts, which gave a chance to 'scarcely any', increased in the late 1920s and 1930s,<sup>126</sup> and in 1931 Julius E. Day asked why publishers were 'still shy of native talent?'<sup>127</sup> One disgruntled letter sent to the *Daily Express* by Arthur Beckett claimed that 'two-thirds of practically every concert programme to which the public listen is composed of items by foreign composers'.<sup>128</sup>

These complaints were not without foundation. In Birmingham, the City Orchestra opened its 1924 season with programmes dominated by Brahms, Strauss, Mendelssohn, Dvorák, and especially Beethoven, varied by Butterworth's Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad*.<sup>129</sup> 'Modern music', the *Musical Times* correspondent for the 1925 Promenade concert series wrote, 'retreats before the Hindenburg line of Bach, Handel, Haydn, and Mozart'. Bach and Handel shared the freedom 'of alternate Wednesdays', Haydn and Mozart enjoyed a symphony each on Tuesday mornings, Bach had an organ work every Saturday, and eight of his concertos 'crop up on other evenings'.<sup>130</sup> Such programming was characteristic of the Promenade concerts throughout the period. In 1939 Mondays were, as they had been for 'years', devoted to Wagner, although Butterworth was included at an evening recital alongside Busconi, Kodály, and Bartók.<sup>131</sup> Miss Mary Jarred's recital at the Æolian Hall in 1929 consisted 'mostly of German *Lieder*', Schubert, Strauss, and Wolf, preceded by Purcell and 'varied by George Butterworth's cycle of four songs', *Love blows as the wind blows*.<sup>132</sup> In 1930 at Wigmore Hall, the same song-cycle of Butterworth's

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125 *DE*, 2 October 1928, p. 3

126 *DE*, 8 January 1929, p. 6

127 *DE*, 6 March 1931, p. 19

128 *DE*, 21 April 1926, p. 8

129 *MT*, 1 November 1924, pp. 1033-4

130 *MT*, 1 September 1925, p. 837

131 *MG*, 14 August 1939, p. 2

132 *Times*, 12 April 1929, p. 12



found a place alongside Handel, Brahms, Debussy, and Dvorák,<sup>133</sup> and the Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* appeared next to Tchaikovsky's violin concerto and Beethoven's fifth symphony at the Bournemouth symphony concert in 1933,<sup>134</sup> with Butterworth's songs heard alongside those of Schubert, Brahms, and violin sonatas by Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms.<sup>135</sup> When English music was overlooked, the reasons were typically financial, as 'most musical ventures' were 'fraught with financial risk'.<sup>136</sup> H. G. Amers claimed that the musical festival at Eastbourne 'always tried to give the young English composers a chance', but there was 'not much notable English music' that had recently been written, explaining the foreign nature of the 1927 programme. Amers also employed English composers 'when we can', but would not sacrifice quality for the sake of nationality. Wagner, Elgar, and Brahms were the 'notable' elements of the festival programme, and the benefit of advertising such names was evident. A. E. V. Dennis, the entertainments manager, calculated the advance sales and expected the 1927 festival – the fifth annual – to be the 'most successful festival we have held yet'.<sup>137</sup>

On balance, the foreign 'classics' were more often sharing the concert programme with 'native' works such as Butterworth's that had built up a high-quality reputation for themselves. Butterworth's name was consistently put next to the likes of Mozart, Handel, Brahms, Schubert, and Wolf,<sup>138</sup> while his settings of Housman were considered 'the best yet' by Stanley Bayliss of the *Musical Mirror*.<sup>139</sup> Butterworth's settings were used as a standard against which other composers could be judged. C. W. Orr's seven songs from *A Shropshire Lad* appeared in the summer of 1934 and were considered to lack the feel that Butterworth had: 'If the poet leads us there with a gentle hand on one arm it is not for the composer, on his side, to tug at the other. Far better a composer who feels the power of that

133 *Times*, 3 March 1930, p. 12

134 *MG*, 16 August 1933, p. 10

135 *MG*, 15 March 1930, p. 13

136 *MT*, 1 February 1923, pp. 132-4

137 *DE*, 7 November 1927, p. 2

138 *MG*, 9 November 1929, p. 11; *Manchester Guardian*, 15 March 1930, p. 13

139 *Musical Mirror*, August 1930, p. 212



reticence and makes himself at one with it as Butterworth did'.<sup>140</sup>

The perceived quality of Butterworth's music was inherent in concert programming, too. Mr. Everard de Peyer performed 'several songs' by Bax, Parry, Warlock, and Butterworth as well as Schubert, Brahms, Wolf, and Strauss during the 1928 season of the British National Opera,<sup>141</sup> and the young baritone Robert Wright chose to perform Bantock, Vaughan Williams, and Schumann alongside two Butterworth works at the Tudor Galleries in 1926.<sup>142</sup> The 1926 Promenade concert programmes showed that although Brahms, Beethoven, Bach, Haydn, Handel, Mozart, and Wagner were the most prominent composers, 'It was pleasant to notice on September 25 that such things as Delius' "Brigg Fair," Holst's "Planets," and McEwen's "Grey Galloway" are now regarded as sufficiently popular for performance on Saturday nights', and George Butterworth's 'fine-feeling' Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* found its place next to Wagner on the programme for Monday 4 October.<sup>143</sup> In the north during 1929, Sir Hamilton Harty conducted the Hallé Orchestra in Schubert's C major Symphony and Butterworth's *The Banks of Green Willow* in Bolton,<sup>144</sup> and the Hallé's February Manchester concerts included Beethoven, Haydn, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky, pierced by Butterworth's work.<sup>145</sup>

With the encouragement of important individuals like Henry Wood and Adrian Boult, new English music was able to demand large proportion of concert programmes both at home and abroad. At the 1921 International Music Festival in Zürich, Wood conducted the Rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad*, which 'made a most profound and deep impression upon the Orchestra and the public, and the various press opinions were very much in its favour'.<sup>146</sup> In 1922 Boult conducted *Two English Idylls* in

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140 *MT*, 1 August 1934, pp. 714-6

141 *MG*, 10 March 1928, p. 11

142 *MG*, 5 June 1926, p. 15

143 *MT*, 1 November 1926, pp. 1026-7

144 *MT*, 1 March 1929, pp. 262-4

145 *MT*, 1 April, 1929, pp. 353-6

146 Henry Wood to Alexander Butterworth, 26 October 1921, MS.Eng.c.453



Vienna,<sup>147</sup> the first *Idyll* in Barcelona (which was liked ‘immensely’),<sup>148</sup> and an unnamed ‘work of Butterworth’ in Prague, which ‘made a very deep impression’. The *Pioneer* realised that these developments ‘slowly but surely’ extended the ‘knowledge and appreciation of British music’ on the Continent.<sup>149</sup> Later in the period, Butterworth’s *Rhapsody A Shropshire Lad* was heard in Toronto (1928),<sup>150</sup> Mühlacker, in Baden-Württemberg (1931),<sup>151</sup> and Montreal (1936),<sup>152</sup> as well as another Boult performance in Salzburg (1935).<sup>153</sup> The growing reputation and extending international audience of Butterworth’s music, and English music in general, was to some extent reliant on the influence men like Adrian Boult could wield, but the reactions of foreign audiences to the music of George Butterworth reflected the reality that England was no longer *Das Land ohne Musik*.

## Conclusion

When war came in 1939, the images of a discovered England became things to protect, to fight for, as people wanted to see something of their country, or what they pictured their country to be like. This idea was expressed in Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941), T. S. Eliot’s return to ‘significant soil’ in his poem sequence *Four Quartets* (1943), and Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* (1945).<sup>154</sup> During the Second World War the BBC attempted to limit the amount of ‘enemy’ music broadcast on the radio, and in the 1940s ‘programmes of music by British composers killed in the last war’ became more popular.<sup>155</sup> Initial evidence suggests that, as in 1914, Butterworth’s nationality encouraged radio and concert programmers to play his music in the 1940s much like in 1914. Further study on Butterworth’s musical reception would contribute to the

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147 *Times*, 14 January 1922, p. 8

148 Adrian Boult to Alexander Butterworth, 7 June 1922

149 *Pioneer*, 16 February 1922, MS.Eng.c.453

150 *MT*, 1 December 1928, p. 1135

151 *MG*, 10 November 1931, p. 10

152 *MT*, 1 February 1936, pp. 172-5

153 *Times*, 12 August 1935, p. 8

154 A. Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, pp. 10, 14.

155 *MT*, 1 March 1941, pp. 98-100.



understanding of cultural developments and their external driving forces through the Second World War and the Second Folk Revival.

The social response to film, literature, art, music, and all aspects of culture reflects the morals, priorities, customs, and emotions of a society. In this way, cultural history aims to capture the spirit of an age. Having died in 1916 and not composed after 1914, Butterworth took no part in the dialogue of the reception of his music, making its transformations, namely the intense emotional connection between 1916 and 1923, more revealing of the audience. Other studies suggest that this age in England witnessed a cultural reaction against the evils of the modern world that, in the shape of Germany, were seen as a threat to the nation's pre-eminence and even entire way of life.<sup>156</sup> The cultural war which emerged on a European level was indeed visible in the reception of Butterworth's music at home. Such national rivalry, mixed with dissatisfaction at the number of English works on programmes, remained consistent albeit fluctuating with varying aspects of the reception of Butterworth throughout the period. The post-war developments of other cultural forms saw Richard Nevinson and Paul Nash become war artists without a war.<sup>157</sup> The desire to invoke tradition was a reaction to the crisis decade of the 1930s which began with the Great Depression and ended with bombing on London.<sup>158</sup>

Other reactions to such crises included documenting unemployment and social realities, carried out by the likes of George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.<sup>159</sup> The relatively limited pastoral yearning in the reception of Butterworth adds greater definition to the general cultural picture in the 1920s and 1930s. It is important to place Butterworth within this wider cultural context, where parallels and differences may be drawn between different artistic expressions in order to capture a more accurate reflection of the spirit of early-twentieth century England.

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156 M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring* (London, 1989), p. xv.

157 D. Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War*, pp. 308, 319.

158 A. Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, pp. 7-10.

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## WILFRED BROWN'S "FOLKSONGS"

Stephen Duncan Johnston

The tenor, Wilfred Brown, will, for many listeners, have a still unassailable position as an interpreter of Gerald Finzi's songs, in particular *Dies Natalis*. Many consider his recording of this work, in 1963 under the direction of the composer's son Christopher, to be the finest. By that stage Wilfred Brown had already come to be revered by many singers and conductors as more than an outstanding Evangelist in the Passions of J.S. Bach; he was indeed considered by many specialists as 'non pareil' in this role. A talented linguist before he became a professional musician, Wilfred was a singer who believed it essential to articulate text with the clarity of full understanding. He was a man of spirituality, a quality which suffused his performances and recordings of oratorio especially.

What many may not know is that Wilfred also wrote several witty, and beautifully crafted contemporary or topical folksongs and ballads, with which he would often end his recitals. This side to his performing personality would have been a surprise even to many of his close colleagues who had never heard his recitals. Soprano April Cantelo, with whom Wilfred sang and recorded in The Deller Consort from 1953 until 1961, confirmed that he was not one who engaged in the usual banter between singers on tour, although he was always lovely to talk to. He was the one to whom all knew they could turn if there was anything significant or serious to discuss. While never aloof, this reserve, which other singers such as Dame Janet Baker also noted in him, derived not from a lack of humour but in essence from the fact that Wilfred was a perfectionist. The detachment which marked his approach to an engagement was part of his focus towards the creation of the perfect performance, a preoccupation



which his wife Mollie knew obsessed him.

If to members of the Deller Consort there was so often an air of detachment in Wilfred's demeanour, this was utterly understandable in the context of touring, since he was, together with Maurice Bevan, an honorary travel agent of the Deller Consort. In this capacity, it was Wilfred's task to ensure that the ensemble reached their venue at the right time. This distinct responsibility must have kept him engaged in thinking ahead, wondering if connections would be made, and whether the accommodation would indeed be satisfactory and available as booked. He must have spent much time worrying whether he had remembered to complete the myriad tasks needed in arranging travel and accommodation in an era, the 1950s, when the frequency and the abundance of air travel was much less extensive, even if available.

Others, such as Robert Wardell, who with his friend John Carol Case accompanied Wilfrid to many engagements in England, enjoyed many fascinating discussions during such journeys. He explains Wilfred's detachment as follows: "He seemed perpetually serious, and even his smiles were "serious smiles" if that makes sense. I suppose if you rationalise it most jokes have a victim, and Bill could never be unkind in thought or deed." The seriousness to which Robert Wardell refers flowed in large part from Wilfred's respect for his fellows, which in essence vitiated any cheap humour that would find its mark at the expense of others; this was a concept completely alien to him.

If Wilfred's way of looking at the world was based upon a regard for the validity and worth of others which simply did not admit such unkindness, it did not at all impede his fascination with the absurdities of circumstance which





the world at large presented. Indeed his sense of humour was suffused with delight in the ridiculous and the bizarre. The love of the surreal had perhaps developed in him especially during the exigency of war-time, Blitz-torn London. This was a time when many, not just professional comics such as Spike Milligan, must have found humour a natural antidote. Wilfred was no exception, as the Reverend W.D. Kennedy Bell, later Director of Religious Programming for The World Service confirmed in a tribute to Wilfred on Radio Three in 1972. He talked of Wilfred's humour in the following terms: "His self-confessed 'overdeveloped sense of the ridiculous' was quick to seize on the fantastic or absurd story in the newspaper and turn it into a highly amusing ballad." As an example of his love of the ridiculous, there is a delightful story of a colleague and Wilfred, both young Friends' Relief Service workers, picking over a bombed house for items to salvage. They came across a badly damaged piano on the first floor. Having tried unsuccessfully to play it they pushed it out of the first-floor window "to see if it sounded better when it hit the ground"!

Later, Wilfred proved to be a writer of compelling and often trenchant short talks for the Religious Affairs department at the BBC. At the same time, the brilliant wit which in part derived from his linguistic background found expression in his recitals. Wilfred had been highly regarded as a Classicist at school, but had studied German and French at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, from which he graduated in 1949. The wonderful ease of Wilfred's way with words provided a formidable tool with which to inform his presentation of many ludicrous snippets of news with glorious hilarity in his recital programmes of the 1950s and 60s. Many of these songs have survived in long-hand drafts, several with origin and date, from which Wilfred would have sung. Each would form a concluding recital item, invariably as an un-programmed encore. All were set to the rhythms of well-known folk-tunes or ballads, the originals of which Wilfred might even have performed earlier. Anonymous folk-songs were all composed by someone, Wilfred once told a student, but in performance he could deliberately omit that these examples were actually by him! There are many one could adduce here. They cover a vast collection of subjects,



frequently intensely topical, such as the progress of a current cricket Test match series. Some are timeless re-workings of moments of hubris in the never-ending vastness of human fallibility.

This calypso-like example describes the tension of the current Test series in June 1963 and shares the nation's adulation of fast-bowler Freddy Trueman:

*Freddy's Revenge*

Come all you sporting fellows that love the bat and ball,  
And listen to the story I tell to one and all  
Concerning of those famous games in nineteen-sixty-three:  
West Indies versus Eng-er-land – Ah Fred's the man for me.

At Lord's the second test-match had every sort of thrill:  
You never saw a finer game, no more you never will.  
But weep for Cowdrey's forearm, consigned with many a tear  
To a place in British history next door to Jenkin's Ear.

Ted Dexter – he's our captain – he put Fred on to bowl.  
Hunte faced him from the Nursery End. But horrors, bless my soul!  
He smote Fred for a boundary; not one, nor two, but three...  
Thirteen off that first over..... Is Fred the boy for me?

Those runs made all the difference, but, dusky foes, be warned  
That hell it hath no fury quite like a Trueman scorned.  
He took a load of wickets, and we drew the game. But see  
He's still to get his own back. – Yes, Fred's the boy for me.

Fair stood the wind for Edgbaston, and time to start again.  
We watched a little cricket and bucketfulls of rain.  
The soggy midland wicket robbed many of their luck,  
For no-one scored a century and three men made a duck.

The BBC excelled itself: alert, precise and fair,  
And streams of Arlott's rhetoric came rolling through the air.  
For Butcher's strokes were wristy, Ted drove imperiously,  
And Wesley Hall danced every ball. – But Fred's the boy for me.



On the fifth day at 12.40 our good Lord Ted declared.  
 Now Frank (says he) 'tis your turn. Fred's bowling. Don't be scared.  
 Just score a run a minute, stay in till after tea.  
 But Fred's all set, I'm warning you - 'Tis Fred's the boy for me.

Two early wickets tumbled and panic seized the chaps.  
 By 3 p.m. Fred organised a Caribbean collapse.  
 His afternoon's analysis read seven for forty-four.  
 Hip, hip, hooray! And Happy day! Could England ask for more?

God bless you Freddy Trueman; your honour's satisfied,  
 You've proved you're indispensable to any English side.  
 We're level in the series and bound for Headingley.  
 So take the ball and bowl 'em all. And on to victory!

[Alternative last half line: You ARE the boy for me!]

Alongside this paean of praise for a heroic sportsman can be found the delectable account of the hubris faced by judges handing out a sentence to a burglar, while something amiss was happening in their vestibule:

*The Ones That Got Away*

Mr Justice Milmo, Mr Justice Blain  
 Being High Court judges, this I should explain -  
 Enter gaily The Old Bailey on Ascension Day  
 To the Queen's Division wend their solemn way.

But while they're dispensing dire judicial doom  
 There's a prowler prowling round their robing room  
 Oh so cheeky, oh so sneaky, sniffing out the loot  
 Bold intruding robber frisks each classy suit.

Mr Justice Milmo, Mr Justice Blain  
 Now you've lost your wallets, cash and watch and chain  
 Mr Milmo soon you will go for your Horsham train  
 "Lost your season ticket? You must pay again!"



Naughty mister robber this you'll do no more  
 New locks have been fitted to the judges' door.  
 God helps those that help themselves, so when your case falls due,  
 If you land Blain or Milmo, then (brother) God help you!

Wilfred's facility with words makes a tantalising ambiguity out of the proverb 'God helps those that help themselves.' Delightfully understated, the moment of irony is delicious, as is his mock seriousness at the robbers' future fate should they come before the same judges again.

The tale of three intrepid camping girls was another piece of verse written in response to a small snippet of news. Having set off on a camping holiday from the concrete factory where they worked, the girls arrived at their first-night accommodation, relieved at last to divest themselves of the heavy load under which they been struggling all day:

*Excess Baggage*  
 (Tune: Kingsfold)<sup>1</sup>

Come all ye bold hitch-hikers and listen if you please:  
 This is the tale of Sheila and Janet and Denise.  
 They work in a concrete factory in Widnes, Lancashire<sup>2</sup>,  
 They said: "It's coming Easter; let's go to Windermere".

"We'll go to work on Thursday; then, when we've done our shift,  
 We'll set out from the factory and thumb the nearest lift.  
 Wi' any luck, by nightfall we'll reach the camping-site;  
 We'll need our tents and bedrolls, so keep your luggage light."

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1 Editor's note: 'Kingsfold' will be familiar as the melody used by Vaughan Williams in his *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus*, should you wish to attempt a rendering (slurring of two notes is needed occasionally!).

2 Editor: Before readers leap to their pens or emails, Widnes was, historically, in Lancashire, although now in Cheshire (which, in any case, does not scan!)



They went to work on Thursday complete with all their gear.  
They stowed it in the office where none could interfere.  
But someone knows the secret. A lowdown chance he sees  
To make life hard for Sheila and Janet and Denise.

The whistle blew for freedom. They grabbed their bulky packs,  
And off towards the motorway they made determined tracks.  
But in between the hitches – for girls get lifts with ease –  
There’s something worries Sheila and Janet and Denise.

“My back is nearly breaking”, says Sheila tearfully.  
“I thought the same”, says Janet, “Me too”, adds little D.  
They stagger into Windermere, worn out and on their knees,  
Then straight to sleep fall Sheila and Janet and Denise.

So on Good Friday morning they waken bleary-eyed.  
“Why are those packs so heavy? Let’s take a look inside.  
And soon they solve the mystery – Wrapped round with shirts and socks,  
Each finds, to her astonishment, three six-pound concrete blocks.

The bloke who put them in there must mind his Qs and Ps,  
“We’re out for blood”, says Sheila and Janet and Denise.  
“For there’s no finer exercise for biceps, we dare say,  
Than humping chunks of concrete along the Queen’s highway”.

Fittingly, although Wilfred leaves the story at the point of discovery,  
he sets up the most delectable prospect of the girls, now much stronger of  
muscle, planning how to get equal with their tormentor!

Then there was the hilarious story of the mis-spelt white line  
instruction! Local to his home in Petersfield, the protagonists would  
possibly have been known to members of the audience in his recitals there.  
It must have given Wilfred much delight to be able to describe the moment  
of hubris in this story of the irascible, domineering foreman. Wilfred  
abhorred pretension, airs and graces in all people, and especially among  
his fellow musicians and artists. Yet he ends his account of this event not  
with glee at the humiliation experienced by the wretched foreman, but



with an expression of generosity. That was the mark of a man for whom slap-stick humour was too cheap. Wilfred was compassionate to a fault.

(Tune: *The Garden Where the Praties Grow*)

Ye citizens of Petersfield, I'll ask you to give ear  
You've noticed how from time to time new traffic signs appear.  
But have you ever thought about the chaps that paint the signs  
Or spend their lives a-painting all those white and yellow lines?

Then bow your heads in gratitude and thank the powers above  
For all the selfless gentry who toil with skill and love –  
The clerk and the Surveyor and the Treasurer and me  
And all the other mooshes in the U.D.C...

There was me and Nosey Parker and Ged and Joe McGrew.  
Old Nosey, as the foreman, told us what we had to do.  
"Today we've got some lettering, we're going to paint the SLOW  
Where the small road joins the big one by the G.P.O."

The staff was soon assembled, and we set off for The Square.  
We set up boards with "Men at Work" and "No thoroughfare",  
And Nosey went on hands and knees in attitude devout,  
And solemnly produced the chalk and said, "I'll sketch it out".

Now Nosey was no scholar, and though it sounds absurd,  
He seemed uncertain how to spell this four-letter word!  
And when he'd finished scrawling we observed with shame and woe,  
He's gone and spelt it S, then L, then W, then O.

We wondered, should we paint it out? But knew it wasn't wise,  
He used to lose his temper if we dared to criticize.  
I winked at Ged, Ged winked at me and we both of us winked at Joe.  
When Nosey ordered: "Paint her in", we said "Right Ho".

He went and got his hair cut while we did the whiting-in.  
We really did a lovely job, and then 'twas time for din.  
Then all you worthy burghers came crowding all around.  
And in the council offices the 'phones began to sound.



“You rotten lot”, says Nosey. “I think you might have said”.  
 But Nosey – you’re the foreman. We thought you might see red.  
 Then, everybody makes mistakes. But now you’ve seen the light,  
 We’ll go and turn the letters round and set the matter right.”

So bow your heads in gratitude and thank the powers above  
 For all the selfless gentry who toil with skill and love –  
 The clerk and the Surveyor and the Treasurer and me  
 And all the other mooshes in the U.D.C...

These moments of delight in the absurd, or in the triumph of just deserts, hardly carry with them a sense of ‘Schadenfreude’ or even the passing of judgement on his fellows. There was no sense in which Wilfred ever appears to have been ‘holier than thou’. Nor was he in any sense a prude, as is evinced by his delightful ‘Folksong’ lamenting the ban on mini-skirts imposed at a famous Oxford College. The reader notes with some amazement the aplomb with which Wilfred slips in the profoundly erudite synonym for calf, namely ‘gastrocnemius’; perfectly apposite of course to a topic exemplifying the collision of the world of modernity with the groves of high academia.



*Save Our Skirts*

[Tune: Traditional Scandinavian]

Miss Janet Vaughan, D.B.E.,  
 – the Head of Somerville is she –  
 Last summer passed the stern decree,  
 Ah me, alas, alack .....  
 That ladies sitting their exams  
 Should not wear clothes that showed their hams;  
 It might distract the men (poor lambs!)  
 To see a mini-skirt.

Parisian haut-couturiers  
 Now say the skirt has had its day,  
 Just when we thought ‘twas here to stay.  
 Ah me, alas, alack ....



But I know some who will refuse  
 To countenance such dismal news;  
 Some men take quite decided views  
 Upon the mini-skirt

Now what young ladies choose to wear  
 - which bits to hide, which bits to bare -  
 Is strictly speaking *their* affair.  
 Ah me, alas, alack.....  
 A shapely gastrocnemius  
 On tube-train, bicycle or bus  
 Is really no concern of us.  
 - What *is* a mini-skirt?!

So if you care how girls are dressed,  
 It may be in your interest  
 To raise your voices and protest  
 Ah me, alas, alack....  
 Dear Mr Michael Stewart, please  
 Extend your wage-and-prices freeze  
 To fix the height of ladies' knees  
 And save the mini-skirt.

Once again we have a gloriously farcical conclusion, typical of Wilfred's delight in the absurd. He not only implores the then Secretary of State for Education, with mock seriousness, to resolve matters of fashion in universities, but, wonderfully and impossibly, to legislate even further. Wilfred well understood the issues, and the song takes evident delight in the beauty of the youthful female form, but his own way of looking at the world is perfectly shown: with great good sense he indicates that sartorial matters are of no importance, but issues of freedom and equality most certainly are.

One of the most poignant of these compositions is the 'Folksong' entitled *When I was Young and in my Prime*. It is undated, but was undoubtedly composed towards the end of Wilfred's life when he knew his days were numbered. It concludes with a re-working of part of his will, which he recounts in a moment of bathos as a spoof moment of



triumph; a perfect lightening of touch. The verse starts by recounting the moments of magic as a young man in the full flowering of love. Yet to continue this otherwise wonderful memory to its conclusion would have been mawkishly inappropriate for the conclusion of a recital, so the song changes tack, almost abruptly, to introduce a reference to a love-death, couched in delectable euphony, coupled to the thorny issue of what to do with the body, once dead!

When I was young and in my prime  
With energy to spare  
I'd bike a hundred miles a day  
Provided she was there.

At night beneath her window  
I'd whistle chunks of Brahms  
Till she came tripping down the path  
To land up in my arms.

Now I'm old and done for  
My joints begin to creak  
The girls are getting prettier  
My hearing's rather weak.

In days of song and legend  
In one grave we'd have lain  
So from the mouldering lap of love  
A rose might spring again.<sup>3</sup>

But burial's outmoded  
It clutters up the church  
So I've signed away my torso  
For medical research.

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3 Editor: as the singer at the first performance of Finzi's Hardy settings *Till Earth Outwears* (McVeagh: Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music. Boydell Press, 2005; p. 253) and a regular performer of similar songs, there's a tantalising echo of Hardy here?



My eye I'll give the eyebank  
- I laughed to get the forms -  
At least when I'm anatomised  
I'll cheat the wiggly worms!

Humour at the expense of self often shadowed his writing, but not in any falsely modest sense. Wilfred never over-stated his own significance, yet he understood well his own worth and what he could contribute.





## BOOKSHELF

### ‘Sir George Dyson: His Life and Music’

Paul Spicer (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2014)

ISBN 978-1843839033 480pp. £45.00

Finzi enthusiasts will no doubt know of Paul Spicer as the conductor of many fine recordings of twentieth-century British choral music, often with either the Finzi Singers or the Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir. He is also a composer, and an author too, of a biography of Herbert Howells (Seren Books, 1998) of whom he was a composition student. His most recent publication is this magnificent study of Sir George Dyson, composer, organist, teacher, educator and administrator, which will surely be a revelation to many readers to whom the name of Dyson means little.

For someone who was to gain so eminent a position as Director of the Royal College of Music, George Dyson came from very humble beginnings. He was born in Halifax in 1883 to a mother who was a weaver and a father a foreman blacksmith (a trade he commemorated in the short 1933 choral work *The Blacksmiths*, dedicated to his father’s memory). Regular attendance at the local Baptist church led to Dyson’s interest in the organ, and by the age of sixteen he was a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists. In 1900 he entered the Royal College of Music (RCM) with an Open Scholarship to study organ and composition. For the latter, his professor was Charles Villiers Stanford who, for all his impatience and often brusque manner, ‘could give first-rate technical advice.’ But it was the College principal, Hubert Parry, who was to have the most lasting influence on Dyson.



On winning the Mendelssohn Scholarship in 1904, Dyson's initial desire had been to study at Leipzig, but Stanford suggested otherwise: 'Go to Italy, my boy, and sit in the sun.' This proved to be sound advice. In return for the year's award of £100 (then a considerable sum) Dyson had to send home evidence of his compositional progress. 'I trust the committee will find in my work sufficient evidence that I have endeavoured to use well my opportunities for work', he wrote, when his year was almost up. These words accompanied two quartets, four piano pieces and some songs, together with promise of a forthcoming orchestral suite, and were combined with a request that his scholarship might be continued, which it was. A year later Dyson was granted a further year's extension, enabling him to travel to Germany and Austria. He met several prominent musicians of the day, including Joseph Joachim, but the one disappointment was his failure to meet Richard Strauss, despite 'three or four fruitless attempts to see him' at his home at a time when Dyson had been informed by Strauss that he would be in. Nevertheless, Dyson saw *Salome* in Dresden while he was himself contemplating an opera. 'On the question of sex', he wrote, 'it seemed to me that some attempt might be made to write a work which should be quite outside the sphere of animal passion, and which should be founded upon one of those spiritual aspirations which represent all that is best and highest in humanity.' Perhaps he had the teachings of Parry in mind, but with his scholarship not being extended to a fourth year his opera came to the nothing. (It is interesting to note that in works like *In Honour of the City*, *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and *St Paul's Voyage to Melita*, Dyson was to be criticised for the lack of any spiritual dimension in his work, particularly in relation to the Three Choirs Festival.)

Back home, with no private means, Dyson was given a post (through Parry) on the Isle of Wight at the Royal Naval College, Osborne (of *The Winslow Boy* repute) where it was felt that the young naval cadets would benefit from some form of musical instruction. He formed a choir, which sang cantatas, and Dyson even put on stage shows and pantomimes. Dyson recognised the necessity of a university degree for any public school teaching career, and, always a hard-worker, while at Osborne he devoted



time to study as a non-collegiate student of Oxford University. His DMus submission was an impressive four-movement choral symphony, *Psalm CVII*, which, gathering dust in the Bodleian Library, had to wait over 100 years for its premiere<sup>1</sup>.

In 1911 Dyson was appointed Director of Music at Marlborough College. One student remembered how Dyson, having just acquired his first motorcycle, took it on to the school playing fields and 'proceeded to dismantle the machine entirely, laying out all the different parts on the ground. Then he reassembled it again . . . so that when he filled the tank with petrol, and turned on the motor, it started immediately.'

Dyson progressed to Rugby School in 1914, his successful appointment, it is said, owing much to having arrived on a motorcycle, which, the selection committee thought, would 'appeal to the boys'. On the outbreak of war Dyson was quick to volunteer. When he was commissioned to the Royal Fusiliers, as he recalled himself, 'by a sheer accident of official choice I was pushed into training men to use hand grenades', and he subsequently wrote for the War Office what became the official manual on Grenade Fighting, its royalties boosting his income. As Malcolm Arnold wrote much later in a reminiscence of Dyson as Director of the RCM, 'he was very much maligned because he had written an Army Manual on the hand grenade during the First War, and all of us young people at the College did not value him as a musician or a person because of that.' How unfair and unjustified a judgement when he should have been praised for his adaptability.

Dyson's battalion saw action in France and during an artillery bombardment a German shell exploded beneath Dyson's horse. Amazingly, he was physically uninjured, but he subsequently suffered from fainting fits and shellshock and was sent home to convalesce. He was soon to hear of the death of his closest friend, and just over a year later he married his friend's sister. Ever the pragmatist, in a letter to his son

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<sup>1</sup> The first performance took place on 13 March 2014 at St John's, Smith Square, London, with soloists Katy Thomson, Nicola Semple, Daniel Tate and Pierre-Philippe Dechant, the London Chorus and the New London Orchestra, conducted by Ronald Corp.



much later on in life he described the effects of war as having ‘knocked all the aesthetic cobwebs and preciosities out of one, and made the return to normal—if one survived—like being consciously born again . . . I am not quite sure I should have been a far narrower product if I had not had that shattering . . .’

In 1917 he was sent to America and Canada as an examiner for the Associate Board (an episode of which little seems to have been documented), and then in 1919, while working for the Air Ministry, he composed the trio which, added to a short quick march piano sketch already written by Henry Walford Davies, became the well-known *March Past of the Royal Air Service*, the whole work being scored by Dyson. It is ironic that he should later be better known for compiling a service manual and for completing half a popular march than for the many fine works of his own.

His first teaching appointment after the war was as Director of Music at Wellington College (1921–1924) where one of his most popular innovations was a series of lectures that were printed in *Music and Letters* and eventually resulted in *The New Music* (1923), a book that, in Paul Spicer’s words, ‘created a storm of interest’, and about which Arnold Whittall wrote: ‘What ought to interest any musical person is the rewarding phenomenon of the conservative in contact with the radical, and not coming to entirely negative conclusions’.

Dyson was then head-hunted for Winchester College where from 1924 until 1937 he was Master of Music, his most important public school posting and one that was ultimately to be rewarded with the Freedom of the City. While his compositional output was to include much secular and religious music for school use, he was also involved in choral societies. In 1927 he composed the first major choral work to bring him recognition, *In Honour of the City*, a joyful setting of a poem by the Scot William Dunbar which ten years later was to attract William Walton for a Leeds Festival commission. (Dyson dropped the words ‘of London’ for his title and set five of Dunbar’s seven verses to Walton’s six.) First performed at Lincoln in 1928, it was followed by arguably his finest work, *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, which had its first hearing at Winchester in 1931. Popular with



amateur choirs, until 1960 this was quite frequently performed under the composer's baton (an interesting appendix lists all Dyson's performances of this work); it was broadcast in 1963 from Dyson's home town of Halifax, with Stanford Robinson conducting, to mark the composer's eightieth birthday. In 1972 another broadcast performance (also from Halifax), conducted by Donald Hunt, did much to renew interest in the work. It was revived by Robert Tucker's Broadheath Singers at Eton in 1992, and a fully professional Barbican performance in September 1996 under the late Richard Hickox preceded the Chandos recording which has helped establish the work for a new generation. With its memorable six-note rising motto theme that both opens and closes the work, its skilful orchestration and the remarkable characterisation of each pilgrim, it is a work, (one is almost tempted to add, touched with genius), that deserves a far more regular hearing. The success of these secular choral works led to commissions for the Three Choirs. These works, *St Paul's Voyage to Melita* (1933), *Nebuchadnezzar* (1935) and *Quo Vadis?* (Part One only in



1946, and complete in 1949) notched up ten Three Choirs performances between them in the composer's lifetime. *The Canterbury Pilgrims* was not to be heard at the festival until 2012 and it has yet to be given complete at the Henry Wood Proms. A single movement only has been heard on each occasion it has appeared, between 1931 and 1952. 'The Wife of Bath' was performed eleven times, and 'The Monk' once. The Proms can be a useful barometer of a composer's popularity, (or neglect, as in the case of Dyson), and it is something of a shock to find that only three other works by Dyson have been given at the Proms, each in a single performance.

Two of Dyson's most notable characteristics were his remarkable memory (with the ability to reproduce on the piano anything he had heard) and his self-confidence. As Spicer puts it in the book, he 'had a slightly irritating way of believing himself always to be right', which, more often than not, he was. This self-confidence was evident in 1930 when he gave his first series of talks for the BBC, without a script, playing his own illustrations and keeping precisely to the required broadcasting time. These first talks were on variations, with two of them focusing on Frederick Delius's *Brigg Fair* and Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. Perhaps surprisingly, while Dyson's work shows little of the influence of Elgar, Delius was a composer to whom he was more drawn. While in *The New Music* he found fault with much of Delius's style, he recognised one quality, 'perhaps above all others scarce in our time . . . an intrinsic sense of beauty'. Spicer describes the eighth movement of *Quo Vadis?* as 'a Delian landscape of inexpressible beauty', while the second movement of his 1922 orchestral suite, after Walter de la Mare, is in places almost a reinvention of Delius's *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*. In Dyson's Symphony, as well as that of Jan Sibelius, Paul Spicer sees the influence of Delius in the second movement, notably in his harmonic vocabulary. (Other influences mentioned are Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Richard Strauss.) Spicer also suggests Delius's *Caprice and Elegy* as a model for Dyson's 1936 Hereford Three Choirs Festival commission, *Prelude, Fantasy and Chaconne*. Was the work, one wonders, an unspoken tribute to the memory of Delius who had died in 1934?



These 'influences' are no mere imitations. Dyson's works rarely lack invention, character or style, but inevitably his style was before long seen as outdated. Dyson wrote of himself: 'My repute is that of a good technician, happy with words, but not markedly original. I am familiar with modern idioms, but they are outside the vocabulary of what I want to say'. It may have been because of a lack of originality that the *Symphony*, as Spicer has written, 'failed to capture the public's imagination', likewise the *Violin Concerto*. But if these works do not create an immediate impact, they certainly merit further hearing. All Dyson's works have qualities that one can admire, but the composer is at his best with words when his sense of drama, his strong feeling for momentum, and the clarity of his orchestration all combine so effectively. His generally diatonic choral writing reflects his years of public school teaching, with its echoes of chapel hymn singing.

In 1938, Dyson succeeded Sir Hugh Allen as Director of the RCM, a position he held until 1952. In his second College address he referred to some of the more mundane changes he had to concern himself with and joked about 'this queer new Director you have got, who seems to be so inartistically concerned with wash basins and food'. He continued in characteristic fashion: 'I am quite unrepentant. If a girl can't wash her hands or get her lunch, how is she to play Beethoven sonatas?' Not all the changes were to Dyson's credit. Spicer recounts the almost disastrous way in which, after the war, some of the College library's holdings were disposed of. Some rare items bequeathed to the College that Dyson rated of little value were handed over to the lending library and in time many were eventually lost. Similarly, of the College's large collection of plaster busts of composers and other distinguished musicians on display throughout the building, many were 'smashed . . . against the wall of the Opera School in the courtyard'. Some valuable and rare instruments were also lost or sold among the sweeping changes made by Dyson. Other changes were more practical and necessary for the modernising of the College, and all of these Spicer covers with exemplary thoroughness. One of Dyson's most important achievements was to persuade HM Treasury to maintain and



even increase its grant to the College, especially in wartime, so that he could keep up salaries, make retirement allowances available, and increase the value of scholarships. Dyson's efforts to keep the College functioning during the war, with the large drop in student numbers, sometimes went as far as sleeping at the College in the weekdays and even doing a spot of fire-watching on the roof, looking out for incendiaries.

Dyson retired to Winchester in 1952 and before long was at work on a setting of Edmund Spenser, a melodious choral work for the 1955 Winchester Festival, *Sweet Thames, run softly*. He also wrote an autobiography, *Fiddling while Rome Burns* which was published in 1954. Knighted in 1941, additional honours came his way in the Coronation year when he was created a KCVO. Throughout his life he was active in a number of important organisations, amongst them the National Federation of Music Societies (of which he was the first chairman and president), the Incorporated Society of Musicians, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, the Rural Music Schools Association. In retirement, Dyson became Chairman of the Carnegie UK Trust.

Paul Spicer sums up Dyson as a complex and controversial person, and points out his leadership qualities, his brilliant mind, and his breadth of knowledge and experience. He was not a person to promote his own music, though it clearly meant much to him. There is a touching story of Joseph Horowitz as a College student bumping into Dyson one day outside his office. In the brief conversation that ensued, at Horowitz's casual enquiry about *Quo Vadis?* (which he had heard Dyson conduct at Hereford two years before), the composer seemed suddenly to 'change as a person . . . He mellowed and he softened and he actually became really human.'

Like many a composer after his death, Dyson has suffered from neglect, rather more so in his case than in many. As Spicer so rightly concludes, he needs to be rediscovered. Dyson's life, largely spent in academia, was not a particularly exciting or interesting one. Just occasionally the narrative flow of the book is broken by an unnecessarily detailed history of an institution or place with which Dyson was connected, but generally this is as fine



an account of the composer as one could wish. The author's particular interest in, and deep understanding of British music show in every page. Each work is discussed chronologically in great detail. (The only minor handicap of this approach is that accounts of the two parts of *Quo Vadis?*, completed respectively in 1939 and 1948, are separated by 100 pages.)

Thoroughly researched, and written with great clarity, this book is well illustrated, with 38 plates gathered centrally and several others scattered throughout the text. There are over 180 music examples (curiously not all numbered). The appendices include a list of works, a list of texts set by Dyson, and a discography of commercial recordings (which include eight 78rpm recordings of talks Dyson recorded in 1929 for the International Educational Society). One might question why there is a Bibliography as well as a Select Bibliography when they might more usefully have been combined, but one can have nothing but praise for this, the first large-scale assessment of Dyson, which will be essential reading for anyone interested in twentieth-century British music.

Stephen Lloyd

‘Constant Lambert: Beyond the Rio Grande’

Stephen Lloyd (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2014)

ISBN 9781843838982 584 pp. £45.00

This remarkable book is an account of a short-lived but brilliant musical age, its cast of outlandish artistic characters almost as riveting as the composer and conductor Constant Lambert himself. The story is told in 419 packed pages, and, almost more noteworthy, it is followed by 143 pages of appendices, catalogues, lists and discography, all given the forensic Stephen Lloyd treatment. It is a triumph: immediately an enthralling study, a labyrinthine depiction of a colourful world now lost, a wonderful and unique reference book and a vivid exegesis of a musical output still not widely enough performed and appreciated.

In the early 1970s I was, briefly, the Music Editor for an imprint called Simon Publications and my first book for them was Richard Shead's *Constant Lambert*, which was published in 1973. At that date it was a



pioneering study, when most of the central protagonists who had known Lambert were still alive. It was also a remarkably slim volume and while still valuable as a source work, it is now superseded by Lloyd's magisterial study. It is striking how with the passage of time, over the ensuing forty years, so much more of the story can now be told.

Lambert died in 1951, two days before his forty-sixth birthday. In a career that straddled the Second World War, his life and achievement is a unique one, as an architect of what became the Royal Ballet, as a composer, as a notable conductor of pioneering repertoire, and as a writer and music critic he has become the independent voice of a generation. Lambert is renowned for his colourful lifestyle, for his repartee and as a raconteur. Lloyd in his Introduction and twenty chapters documents it all in a depth not previously achieved. Indeed, I make the total number of footnotes to be a staggering 1732, and many of these are worthwhile contributions in their own right. The pictures, too, are better and more extensive than anything previously attempted, including some in colour. Lloyd even gives us examples of the more respectable examples of Lambert's scurrilous limericks about bishops, such as:

The Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross  
Was rarely, if ever, at loss  
For a typical phrase  
Explaining God's ways  
Such as calling Our Saviour 'The Boss'.

Constant Lambert's music will doubtless be the primary interest of most readers of this book and the author does it proud, including not only discussion of the history of everything Lambert wrote, but also a properly detailed catalogue (why do so many music books try to get away with simple title lists that are useless for any practical purpose?). The discography, too, is wonderfully exhaustive and detailed. All publishers of music books pleased note, this is the gold standard: how it should always be done.

The title of Lambert's most famous work, *The Rio Grande*, gives the book its subtitle. The accounts of the circumstances of the composition of each work, and its reception at the time are remarkably well done,



Constant Lambert

marshalling an impressive array of sources. However, generally, the author does not often offer his personal assessment or value judgement of Lambert's music. This would be good to have, especially in those cases where the music was for years a contentious issue (as, for example, the ballet *Tiresias*) or where the music has still not been revived, as in the case of the elusive *Dirge from Cymbeline*.

The detailed appendices are not merely lists, but throw invaluable light on such matters as Lambert's journalism. Here each article cited in the extensive list of Lambert's articles includes a summary of its content. When sources researched include such forgotten newspapers as *The Sunday Referee* (for which Lambert wrote regularly) this clearly indicates long hours spent at the newspaper library before it left Colindale. Lambert's writings deserve wider dissemination in full, collected in another volume. The lists of Lambert's talks for the BBC, his Third Programme concerts in the 1940s, his appearances at the Proms and the extensive discography all remind us of Lambert's achievement and his influence in his day.

This is a big book, two inches thick and the paper used makes it notably heavy, so that reading it in bed or on the tube is awkward, but it is beautifully produced and a joy to own. It is strongly recommended, indeed essential for all interested in Lambert and his times.

Lewis Foreman



## 'The Music of Herbert Howells'

Edited by Phillip A. Cooke, and David Maw

(The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2014)

ISBN 9781843838791 383pp. £50.00

Adapted from a 'breakfast talk' at a Convention of the Association of Anglican Musicians, Washington DC, 19 June, 2014.

Herbert Howells, or 'Holy Herbert', as he was affectionately dubbed by his contemporaries, was an unusually modest man. He would have been moved and perhaps surprised to discover that, to mark his centenary, pretty well every Collegiate Chapel and Cathedral Choir in the UK sang one or more of his settings during the birthday weekend (October 17 and 18) in 1992.

More than twenty years later, Howells's music continues to be very much a part of worship all over the world. I am sure that today I am 'preaching to the converted'. Is there anyone present who has not been moved by a Howells setting, such as the carol-anthem *A Spotless Rose* or the anthem *Like as the hart*? On the other hand, how many of us have actually heard, let alone performed, more than a dozen of his choral and organ works? Of course one excuse is their difficulty, but I hope the three settings we have heard this week—the *Westminster Service* and *Behold, O God our defender*, and (at St John's, Georgetown) the American premiere, ninety years after it was written, of *By the waters of Babylon*, for baritone, violin, cello and organ, will have whetted our appetites enough to try some of the less well-known pieces.

It is easy to forget the depressing state of composition in the Anglican and Episcopal church that Howells inherited when he began to write for the church (with a few notable exceptions such as the works of Charles Wood and Charles Villiers Stanford). The often poor quality was clearly on the mind of Eric Milner-White, Dean of King's College, Cambridge when, in 1920, after hearing *A Spotless Rose*, he wrote the following to Howells: 'We have recently shot out dozens of services and even the minimum that remains is not all up to the standard that we desire here. If you ever feel minded to write a Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, we will



put it on at once, gratefully. The church would profit from a new idiom there! Well, the rest as they say 'is history'; and it is extraordinary to see how in the next fifty years Herbert Howells was to respond so prolifically to Milner-White's request, by composing some twenty settings of the Evening Canticles, numerous Te Deums, not to mention a host of fine anthems. Indeed after the disappointing reception given to his Second Piano Concerto, and later the tragedy of his son, Michael's death from polio at the age of nine, Howells as a person and composer seems really to have been rescued by the church, despite his own religious doubts.



Herbert Howells

This however did not happen immediately. For it was only with the *Collegium Regale* settings in 1945, that the muse began to flourish in earnest, with seven separate services composed by 1957; there was then a gap of nearly a decade until the Salisbury set in 1966, followed by another seven, ending with the *Dallas Canticles* in 1975. All these settings share a sound world, but each seems to have an individual character. Some were written for specific buildings, but quite a number, now indissolubly associated with particular places like the ever-popular *Gloucester Service*, were not in the composer's mind originally. There is always a recognizable style, but in the 1960s and 70s the textures and harmonies became more astringent, with a greater sense of declamation. To the tonal palette of Wood and Stanford, who had introduced symphonic elements into cathedral music, Howells added the distinct flavour of the French Impressionist composers.

But who really was Howells? Well, we are gradually finding out more. It has been rightly said that Howells's music appeals to those who prefer 'incense to sermons'. The British scholar, the Reverend Dr Paul



Andrews, has noted that there is invariably a rich strain of sensuousness in the music, acknowledging that Howells was a very sensual man, strongly attractive to women and equally strongly attracted by them (!), and finds a secular element that adds ‘such piquancy, even ecstasy to the writing’.

At the end of a revealing article ‘*The Enduring Grace of Herbert Howells’s Requiem*’, in the April 2014 issue of the Association of Anglican Musicians Journal, Richard Carter referred to the recently published book *The Music of Herbert Howells*. This, the first large-scale study of Howells, not only surveys the music but also gets, I believe, to the heart of the man. Complementing the ground-breaking biographies by Christopher Palmer and Paul Spicer, the editors have assembled a team of scholars, who, as John Rutter acknowledges in his evocative Foreword, offer the detailed critical and analytical attention Howells has so long deserved. Today I would like to draw attention to the key elements in the book, as well as commending some of the less-performed choral works.

My own experience of Howells’s music dates back to 1953, and singing *Behold, O God, our defender* at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. As it happens, this anthem is the first work analysed by David Maw in his ‘Introduction: Paradox of an Establishment Composer’. He writes: ‘If the muted tone and warm sound-world of the piece seem to manifest the respectability expected for such an occasion, they sit oddly with the ecstatic turn the music continually takes.’ Maw’s analysis of the harmonic sequences of the three clauses from Psalm 84, and how they are stretched, is complemented by his conclusion that there is also something “highly personal and emotionally raw”. I very much agree. Maw also refers to the orchestrated version used at the Coronation, which inevitably is rarely heard, but which represents Howells at the height of his powers, as does the sweeping phrase ‘For one day in thy courts is better than a thousand’.

As Patrick Russill has written, Howells’s musical language is ‘simultaneously nostalgic and hopeful, personal and corporate. In addition to his uniquely evocative exploitation of voices in architectural space, Howells manages to encapsulate not just the ethos of the service, typically progressing from introversion to proclamation, but also to suggest the



continuum of tradition, spiritual, cultural and musical, of which the worshipper is a part.'

In *The Music of Herbert Howells*, the impact of the heart-breaking death of his son, Michael, is also discussed perceptively, providing the most informed account we are likely to have of what actually happened. There is an intriguing chapter, 'Musical Cenotaph: Howells's *Hymnus Paradisi* and Sites of Mourning' in which Byron Adams suggests, supported by strong evidence from Howells's daughter, Ursula, that 'in the process of trying to hold on to the memory of his son, Howells tended to idealise away any real and personal characteristics, so that 'Michael' became a metaphor for the grief itself.' Adams also acknowledges that investigating Howells's personal convictions can be unsettling to many who only know him as a composer of church music. In other words, the title of 'Holy Herbert' may be somewhat misleading.

It has become clear that many more of Howells works were affected by the tragedy than had been previously appreciated, including the unfinished Cello Concerto. Howells continued to work on this concerto 'for Mick' throughout his life; as he wrote to Arthur Bliss, 'I keep pulling to pieces and remodelling'. The young Durham-based scholar, Jonathan Clinch, has now completed (with invaluable advice from John Rutter), the last movement, of which Howells had left considerably more than previously thought; and a recording has been made.<sup>1</sup>

In the chapter 'Austerity, Difficulty and Retrospection: The Late Style of Herbert Howells' (yes, the book does have its weighty moments!), Phillip Cooke makes a powerful case for several of the neglected later works, notably the extremely difficult *Stabat Mater* and the *Chichester Service*. As Cooke says, these late, austere works and others like *Antiphon* and *Sweetest of sweets* (which I last heard in 2011 when Sir David Willcocks memorably conducted the Queens's College, Cambridge Chapel Choir at the Howells-Stanford weekend) do not represent 'a composer going through the motions, rather they are the refinement and fine-tuning of a

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1 Recorded for Dutton (CDLX 7317) by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, conducted by Ronald Corp, with the cellist Alice Neary.



life-time's building of an aesthetic and technique.'

Talking of Sir David reminds me of an occasion when he was in Winchester in the 1970s and we were rehearsing *Like as the hart*: he said he felt 'the music was coming out of the stones'.

As well as not always being 'holy', Herbert could be a trifle pompous. In 1972, after I had conducted the premiere of his *Grace 'For the Prime Minister, Edward Heath'* (at 10 Downing Street, before a dinner celebrating William Walton's seventieth birthday), Howells was kind enough to send me a note of congratulation to pass on to the singers; and this is how he began: 'I did not write immediately; to have done so would have prevented me from doing justice to your performance!'

Referring back to Howells's many settings of the evening canticles, Andrew Millinger and the Collegiate Singers, who act as a deputy choir at Westminster Abbey, have recorded all 20 evening settings plus all the morning ones, for Priory Records. This was some undertaking—not least for the organ accompanist, Richard Moorhouse, former organist at Llandaff in Wales.

But are there any simple works, you may ask? Yes, there are! Novello recently published the genuinely simple introit, *God be in my head*, edited by Patrick Russill who reveals that the piece was written by Howells in some spare minutes before the end of a theory lesson at the Royal College of Music, in June, 1966. And as Patrick reports, the beautiful consecutive octaves that preface the quintessentially Howellsian final cadence are deliberately initialled 'H. H'!

Another novelty is the lovely setting of Psalm 121, *Levavi oculos meos—Aubade for a wedding*, for sopranos and organ, with its enchanting ending, where Howells has put quotation marks around the final organ phrase, acknowledging the self-quotation from the closing chords of the Gloria in the *Gloucester Service*.

Other works worth considering are: *Blessed are the dead* and *Salve Regina*, both early works. But if you want a real challenge, then have a look at the difficult *St Augustine's Edgbaston Service*, or *One thing have I desired*: one of the most meaty and demanding bits of a cappella Howells.



I have not yet mentioned the *St Paul's Service, Take him earth for cherishing*, the hymn tunes or the organ works, and hardly any of the chamber music . . .

As many here today will be aware, Howells wrote several works specifically for the US market, notably the *Te Deum* for the completion of Washington Cathedral, the Searle Wright *Te Deum* for Columbia University, *Benedictus Es, Domine* for the Cathedral of St John the Divine, New York, and the *Dallas Canticles*. But let me end with a word of warning: when you next perform some Howells, allow yourself enough preparation and your choir extra rehearsal time!

Martin Neary





## CONTRIBUTORS

**Lewis Foreman** has produced many books on music and musicians. With his wife, Susan, he has just published a book on the music critic Felix Aprahamian. Otherwise, most recently *The John Ireland Companion*, and (with Angela Aries) *Armstrong Gibbs: a countryman born and bred*. Other composers include Bax, Elgar, Havergal Brian, Percy Grainger, Edmund Rubbra and Vaughan Williams. Since retiring from the Foreign Office in 1997 he has written widely on music, with Susan researching the encyclopaedic *London: a Musical Gazetteer*. He advises record companies on new repertoire, long working with Dutton Epoch. His CD notes and session photographs are well-known. He writes musical and record industry obituaries for *The Independent*.

**Stephen Duncan Johnston** After seeing the light, he moved from a career in the City to teaching, in part to enable him to sing and direct on a semi-professional basis. His parents were long-standing friends of the Browns and his mother Alison Johnston was one of Wilfred Brown's earliest accompanists. Inspirational lessons from Wilfred Brown and study in Germany enabled him to enjoy annual visits across Holland to sing as *The Evangelist*, one of Wilfred's finest roles, in over twenty performances of Bach's *St John Passion*. His biography of Wilfred Brown is nearing completion and will be published in 2016.

**Stephen Lloyd's** chief interest is in British music. His books include a biography of Delius's close friend 'H Balfour Gardiner' (CUP 1984, paperback 2005), 'Sir Dan Godfrey - Champion of British Composers' (Thames 1995), Eric Fenby's collected writings on Delius (Thames 1996), and studies of William Walton (Boydell 2001) and most recently Constant



Lambert (Boydell 2014) which was included by The Spectator, The Guardian and the TLS in their 2014 'Books of the Year' lists. For 16 years he edited The Delius Society Journal, and has also contributed to books on Bliss, Elgar, Grainger, Scott and Vaughan Williams.

**Martin Neary's** involvement in church music dates from his time as a chorister at the Chapel Royal, singing at the Coronation in 1953. His principal appointments have been at St Margaret's Westminster, Winchester Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. He is noted for championing the music of Jonathan Harvey and John Tavener, as well as being at the forefront of the Early Music movement – in 1978 he directed the first complete performance in England of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* using period instruments. Since 1990 he has been chairman of the Herbert Howells Society; in 1992 he conducted the Howells Centenary Concert in Westminster Abbey, including *Hymnus Paradisi* and *By the water of Babylon*, and in 2015 he directed the premiere in Bethesda, Maryland, of his orchestration of Howells's *A Hymn for St Cecilia*.



**Gareth Roddy** wrote this article as part of his undergraduate studies at Oriel College, Oxford. Since then, he has gone on to complete an MA in Historical Research at the University of Sheffield, where he is currently reading for a PhD. His main research interests are in the cultural history of nineteenth and twentieth century Britain. As well as writing about the reception of George Butterworth, his most recent project explored the literature of Shropshire (including A. E. Housman's poetry and the novels of Mary Webb) as a way of shedding light on identity and imagination in the early-twentieth century.