

“Jacob’s Ladder”

How Gordon Jacob Became a Composer – Part 1

Tully Potter

‘I am working hard at music,’ wrote Gordon Jacob to his elder sister Ismay from Bad Kolberg prisoner-of-war camp in Germany, on August 31, 1918. ‘I hope to have some things fit for publication when I get back, but one’s output here is necessarily small, as the rather monotonous life we lead is not particularly inspiring. However I have learnt quite a lot about composing (even if I can’t do it myself), the chief of which is that it is not so much the material one uses as the treatment of it that counts. Look at Beethoven’s Symphonies and Sonatas. Most of his subjects are quite unpretentious – it is his working of them that makes us open our gaping mouths...’¹

THE BBC USED TO broadcast a radio programme called *The Time of My Life*, in which public figures talked about the most crucial, formative period in their careers. For Gordon Jacob, as for so many who went through the Great War, the time of his life came when he was in uniform – but in a totally unexpected way. Undoubtedly the horror of the trenches (of which he endured more than a year with great gallantry) affected his outlook for the rest of his days, and he never got over the loss of his beloved brother Anstey in the Battle of the Somme. However, his real character-forming experience was



Figure 1 Gordon Jacob

being captured in April 1917 and sent eventually to the camp at Bad Kolberg, in Thuringia, described in Baedeker as ‘a seaport and a frequented seaside resort, with brine and peat baths’.

It was here that he had his first ‘orchestra’ of four strings, three winds and piano. ‘The players were keen and not bad – and it was exciting to have them to write and arrange for, and to conduct,’ he said later, ‘It was very good practice.’ This was the sort of experience that would never have come to him in peacetime, and it came just when he most needed it, when he was

young and enthusiastic enough to make full use of his opportunities. Above all, it determined him to make a career in music, something he would never have done, but for the upheaval of the war. His compositions at Bad Kolberg included *Four Little Sketches*,

¹ The sources for Gordon Jacob’s quotes in this article are two handwritten memoirs, neither of which takes his story beyond the age of 29. In the belief that an artist’s childhood, education and early experiences are the most vital pointers to his creative development, I have edited and linked these screeds into a coherent narrative, making as few changes as possible. Where the two accounts overlap, I have combined them or chosen the more complete version.

dedicated to 'F.J.K.', a fellow PoW, *Entre nous* for piano, *Heliodora*, for female voice (wishful thinking!) and piano, six separate songs to poems by Yeats, Fletcher and Kipling, another song for soprano and piano, and *Invictus*, a piano sonata.

The regime of his previous PoW camp, at Stroehen, had been more severe, but even there he had contrived to find musical solace: 'There was a piano in the mess-room and we had concerts of a sort and even plays. It was a great opportunity for me to keep in some sort of practice and I made some clumsy attempts at composition and played duets with a fellow music-maniac.' This was presumably C. Austin Field, with whom Jacob performed Schubert's first *Marche militaire*, Sibelius' *Valse triste* and Drdla's² *Souvenir*, at a camp entertainment in January 1918 – the printed programme has survived. For a previous entertainment, in November 1917, the two pianists had performed separately, Jacob's selections being a Rachmaninov *Prelude*, a Chopin *Polonaise*, Grieg's *Wedding Day at Troldhaugen* and Debussy's *Arabesque*. Presumably the choice of repertoire was dictated by which scores could be obtained from their German 'hosts'. Jacob wrote:

My compositions were a mixture of Grieg and MacDowell as far as I can remember. I got hold of a harmony book from the camp library and worked right through it, from beginning to end, and I think it was an excellent discipline.

This particular phase was ended when, because of frequent escape attempts (Stroehen was within a week's walk of the Dutch frontier), Jacob and his fellow prisoners were moved farther south to Bad Kolberg. Two of his wartime compositions, *Evening Mood* for cello and piano, and a four-movement *Trio in D minor*, were performed at a 'Concert of Chamber Music' at Bad Kolberg for which we still have the printed programme. Jacob at the piano was joined by his friends C. Austin Field, here playing the violin, and B.M. Wainwright, cello, and they also performed individual movements from works by Haydn, Grieg, Mendelssohn and Beethoven. In his trio, dated 19 October 1917, dedicated to 'O.S.', and subtitled *Pages from the Life of an Exile*, Jacob asserted his Englishness by marking the movements Fairly Fast, Slow, Minuet Time and Very Fast.

In the 'concert hall' at Bad Kolberg were two pianos, one of which Jacob used in his 'orchestra', and he managed to have a third camp piano transferred to his room in the wooden hut which he shared with four other prisoners. He also played hymns on a harmonium at parades; and from Easter 1918 a printed service booklet has survived – presumably Jacob played for this too. He wrote:

The chances of successful escapes were very slim and there were few attempts, though two of our number, who were very determined in their efforts, were shot and killed. The Germans gave them a full military funeral ... I played the Chopin Funeral March with all the repeats at the service, until gently stopped by one of our senior officers. The thought of that has often embarrassed me since, but one of the German officers complemented me on my playing. I think he was surprised that 'Das Land ohne Musik' could produce anyone who knew B flat from H, and therefore kindly overlooked my numerous mistakes.

Jacob found this camp 'a great improvement on Stroehen' and recalled:

In a main hall (the theatre cum concert hall) the health-giving chalybeate waters still flowed. There were also hot showers, a tennis court and comfortable amenities. We went for walks on parole in the beautiful Thuringian Forest two or three times a week, and it was all much more civilised. The food provided by the Germans was no better here, but there was every excuse as they had very little for themselves. There was a good canteen which provided one with music paper and scores, and also purveyed wine at an exorbitant price – nothing of course in the way of food, but the inevitable wartime cigars, also exorbitant.

² František Alois Drdla (1868-1944), Czech violinist and composer

There were a number of PoWs with talent of various kinds, besides music, and from time to time exhibitions of arts and crafts were held. Prisoners had many hobbies and read subjects with a view to future degrees. There were also literary chaps, including the Gloucester poet F.W. Harvey, and plays were put on in which the acting seemed then to be quite good; a stage was built and scenery was made of a simple kind. The Canteen was able to provide materials for that and for the arts and crafts. My orchestra supplied music for these shows when required and also gave concerts from time to time. Tennis tournaments were also held.

Perhaps I am making it all sound too attractive – and from all accounts it was so, compared with the experiences of World War II PoWs – but the *Kommandant* was a real old Prussian and things did not always go smoothly. There was one occasion when some of us had laughed too openly at Appel (roll call) and had to parade every hour with guards front and back, with orders to shoot if a ghost of a smile was seen. The guards were old *Landsturm*ers unfit for the front and we doubted if they were really to be trusted with loaded rifles! The *Kommandant* was equally beastly to them, slapping them hard in the face when they paraded in front of him and displeased him in any way. No wonder he had to slip away with some of the other officers, when the Armistice came and the troops rounded on their officers.

How did Gordon Jacob arrive at the skills which enabled him to be the musical life and soul of a prisoner-of-war camp?

His Beginnings

Gordon Jacob was born on 5 July 1895, at 44 Victoria Road, Gipsy Hill, London, the tenth and last child of Stephen Jacob, Comptroller of the Financial Department of the Indian Civil Service, and Clara Laura Forlong, who were then 45 and 43 respectively. His father, who was stationed in Calcutta, came from a family with long and honourable connections with India, through either the Civil Service or the Army. His grandfather had retired from the Army as a captain to become the leading astronomer in the Observatory at Madras, working among other things on the rings of Saturn. His mother's

family name had originally been French, de Forlonge, and she was descended from a member of this Huguenot family who had settled in Scotland to escape persecution at home. Her grandfather William had married the eldest daughter of the chief of the Gordon clan, and her father Gordon Forlong was a celebrated evangelist who ended his days in New Zealand and is still remembered there.

The new baby was christened Gordon Percival Septimus – the latter because he was the seventh son – but for some reason he was always known as Donny within the family.



Figure 2 Gordon Jacob (right) with brother Anstey

He was born with a hare lip and cleft palate, which cast a pall over his early childhood and affected his self-confidence for the rest of his life. He remembered:

Up to the age of seven I had to undergo a series of operations and was in and out of hospital. How I detested the nauseating taste of chloroform! It was terribly sweet and sticky, and I can remember the queer feel of stitches in the roof of my mouth. The operation was most successful, when one thinks that it had only recently been devised.

Surgery for such defects was indeed primitive by today's standards; but little Donny was better off than his Uncle Frank, who had been born with the same affliction – the lad could barely understand what the older man was saying. He himself was corrected to the point where there was virtually no external sign. However, he was left with a slight speech impediment and was never able to play wind or brass instruments, an ironic deprivation in view of his later eminence in composing for them. He wrote:

This defect, which for some reason is thought to be comic – though blindness, lameness or deaf-and-dumbness provoke sympathy – has been rather trying and has made me shy and socially unforthcoming but one can live with it if one can forget it. Most people throughout my life have enabled me to do so, and it has been no serious handicap in my career.

It must, however – unless children were different in his day – have led to teasing at school, and it made him avoid positions in public life, in which he might be called upon to make speeches. When I spoke to Dame Elizabeth Maconchy, who had studied with him in the early 1920s, his speech impediment was one of the first things she remembered about him. Similarly William Waterhouse recalled Jacob's 'strange disability of speech' as part of the barrier between master and pupil when he first went to study with him in 1948:

It was the effect that having a hare lip has on the way you enunciate certain consonants, I suppose. His moustache concealed it, but when you actually looked, it appeared to be quite a severe hare lip.

By then Jacob had gone to a family friend for elocution lessons and had acquired more expertise in speaking – and more confidence. Meeting him in his last years, I had no inkling, from either his looks or his speech, of his previous problems.

Jacob wrote:

People sometimes say: 'What fun it must have been to be a member of such a large family', but we were in fact never all together. Many men who served in India died untimely, and like my astronomer grandfather, my I.C.S. father died aged only 48 (Stephen Jacob caught enteric fever during a tour of duty in Calcutta). My two eldest brothers were by then both in India, one in the Army and the other in the I.C.S.; and my two eldest sisters, who were grown up, took charge of their two youngest brothers. Two more brothers inevitably gravitated to India in due time and my sisters were more like aunts than sisters, but brothers Nos. 5 and 6 were nearer me in age, in fact No. 6 was less than two years older.

(That was Anstey, with whom the boy Gordon enjoyed his closest family relationship.)

Left fatherless at an early age, he was robbed of even memories of Stephen Jacob.

I have no personal recollection of my father, as he died in India when I was only three. I imagine that I remember my father's last departure for India, but I am not sure. There is a scene in my head of what seems a very large man in the hall of our house, making his farewells.

One precious inheritance his father did leave him:

There had been no specially musical people in the family in previous generations, but my father taught himself musical notation and I have some copies he made, in very clear manuscript, of old Victorian songs which he appears to have enjoyed singing – there were then no copyright laws to forbid the copying of printed music. He also wrote some hymn

tunes of his own, which I possess, in which the choice of harmony was good but the part-writing questionable in places.

The India Office was generous in the matter of pensions, and so my mother was not left in financial anxiety. We all had pensions up to 21 and my mother, of course, had one for life. The girls, too, had them till they married. One of my earliest memories is of moving into a larger house next door and running to and fro from one front garden to another. It is a painful memory, as one of my fingers was pinched in a door hinge. The first house is a dim memory to me of darkness and rather musty smells. The second house, to which we moved in 1899, was new and much larger and lighter. It stood in a plot of about an acre and had a tennis court, a badminton court, a vegetable garden and fruit trees.

This house, number 46, to which the Jacobs moved in 1899, is still standing and has been renovated and divided into flats; but Jacob's birthplace has been razed to make room for a smaller detached house. In those days, the north end of Victoria Road opened on to Alexandra Road at the intersection of Sainsbury Road and the High Street, making numbers 44 and 46 scarcely a quarter-mile walk from Gipsy Hill railway station. Today only the southern part of the road still exists and it has become Victoria Crescent, a development of modern flats stands in place of the northern portion. The opening to Alexandra Road (now Alexandra Drive) has been renamed Mountbatten Close and serves as an entrance to the flats. So Jacob would find it difficult to recognise his boyhood haunts.

Anstey and I had nannies in the early days. They used to take us for walks and one liked taking us the mile or so to Dulwich, to watch the trains go under a bridge. We used to wait until the engine came right up to the bridge and then rush across the road to try to get there before the engine did. What a hope! We also walked down to see the swans on an enclosed little pond opposite Dulwich College's main entrance. I enjoyed my childhood on the whole. We had a large garden and, as with all old people's memories, my early days seem blessed with eternal sunshine. Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee came when I was two, and was followed shortly afterwards by the Boer War. I remember the large photographs of our generals, Lord Roberts ('Bobs'), Redvers Buller and John White which decorated our dining-room walls, and playing at soldiers with wooden swords, helmets etc. On Mafeking Night there was much junketing, but of course I was too young to take part in it. I did, however, see with a thrill the glow in the sky from the bonfire on the recreation ground, and was able to share in the patriotic fervour which swept the country.

It is impossible to enumerate the inventions and ingenious adaptations of them which are now taken for granted and thought of as necessities, but which either did not exist, or were just interesting toys in the Nineties. We small boys had to take notes round to friends and wait for an answer, where now a minute or two on the telephone would serve the purpose. Similarly with shopping, making appointments, calling the doctor, booking theatre and concert tickets and so on.

Our house had gas laid on for lighting except in the drawing room, where there were a central hanging oil lamp and one or two standard oil lamps. The filling, cleaning and care of wicks was quite a chore, and was carried out by my sisters. There were actually gas fires in the dining room and in another downstairs room called the 'study', but this was a very modern house, built in 1898 or thereabouts. It was, however, horribly infested with cockroaches. Apparently there were no insecticides, but traps were used and caught many. They were round tins with finely balanced little bridges across a hole in the top. Attracted by some bait, the insects tried to run across these bridges, which turned over and precipitated them into the tin. When a large number had collected, boiling water was poured into the tin. No wonder I conceived an absolute horror of these loathsome creatures which is still with me today. They had a characteristic smell, too, which was far from endearing. In *Animal Magic*, a children's cantata written only a few years ago, there is a song recording this loathing of cockroaches. I don't mind any other insects...

Which was just as well, since 46 Victoria Road was also a happy hunting ground for black beetles. Jacob wrote:

It was taken for granted that all middle class families had domestic staff according to their means, even if it was only one maid-of-all-work. The better-off had a cook, one or two parlour maids, a housemaid and possibly a kitchen maid who was really the cook's personal servant. Cook was the boss and was paid the most. Servants were paid very little; a cook might get £28 a year, but the rank and file might only have £8 or possibly £10 or £12. But they had good board and lodging and uniform. They were given a half day off in the week and also Sunday evening, so that they could go to church...the family had to make do with cold supper on Sunday night (poor things!), of course after going to church themselves. The staff could not attend morning service because midday dinner on Sunday needed all hands on deck. In our kitchen one wall was decorated with a large coloured print called The Broad and Narrow Way, though the few shillings a week which the staff received could not have paid for many worldly pleasures. The Broad Way contained a large pub and many people going in and out of it. Over a bridge a Sunday Train steamed on its wicked way. Games were being played, including card games, and people were dancing and enjoying themselves. The Narrow Way was a rocky uphill path on which a few good pilgrims, very drably dressed, toiled towards a welcoming glow of light at the top.

Before I was old enough to attend morning service, I was left to be looked after in the kitchen by the servants. A large spit stood in front of the red-hot fire in the range, and on this a huge Sunday joint of beef revolved, dripping fat. I loved the metal moulds which cut pastry into fascinating shapes, but mostly it was prunes or figs and blancmange after the Sunday joint. Dessert was mainly oranges and nuts.' The future composer could not help being musically aware even at table, where a sort of glass harmonica could be organised - even on a Sunday! There were finger bowls all round which could be made to produce musical sounds, the pitch being determined by the amount of water in the bowl. Splendid chords could be sounded when three or four people worked at these bowls.

We quite often entertained one or two people to Sunday dinner, particularly special preachers. Quite a lot of people came to Sunday tea, with very thin slices of bread and butter and rather exotic jams (guava jelly, for instance, or Cape gooseberry). Special preachers included representatives of many charities such as Deep-Sea Fishermen, The British and Foreign Bible Society, Dr Barnardo's and Mr Fagan's children's homes and various foreign missions.

A stern, unseen presence brooding over the house in Upper Norwood was that of Gordon's grandfather and namesake, Gordon Forlong:

He began life as a lawyer and was also active as an atheist... He wrote some books against religion and bitterly regretted this later, when he became converted and devoted his life to preaching and ministering. He preached in a chapel called Talbot's Tabernacle in London and I believe his sermons were notable for fire and brimstone; but on the death of his wife Laura (my maternal grandmother), he remarried and eventually emigrated to New Zealand, where he became the father of a large family. He used to write fairly frequently to my mother, who was a good deal in awe of him, I would say.

Sunday was strictly observed in our house. No secular books to be read except Ruskin, of whom we had a rich row of volumes surpassed in number only by Spurgeon's sermons. There were periodicals like The Quiver and the Sunday at Home, full of improving tales, The Christian Herald, The Christian and one which I think must have been rather left-wing, called The Workman's Messenger. Only slow and rather solemn music was permitted, an exception being made of Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words, probably because of Victoria and Albert's admiration and affection for the composer. There was hymn singing after supper. Church was attended morning and evening - or, when Anstey and I were small, children's service in the afternoon. My sisters taught in Sunday school.

Other taboos were in force at all times. No theatres, no dancing, no card games except Patience, to which my mother was addicted. Alcohol and tobacco were of the Devil and sex

was 'not nice' – 'We don't talk about that sort of thing'. Religion was more a matter of fear of future damnation than a source of comfort, solace and meditation. All these things were accepted as unavoidable facts of life and no one was unduly depressed by them.

Despite this Evangelical outlook, the family actually belonged to the Church of England, perhaps because Gordon's father had been a member.

Musical Overtures

Although Gordon's mother was important to him, his elder sisters Eva and Ismay loomed even larger in his early life – especially Ismay, to whom he was very close. Whereas Eva managed to escape from the family circle, first to Africa as a missionary and then to marriage and her own family, Ismay never married and devoted much of her life to being her mother's companion and looking after her younger sister and brothers. Her only compensation for this selfless life was that she qualified for her India Office pension to the end of her days. Jacob remembered:

My two elder sisters taught me and Anstey the three Rs and I learnt to read when I was under four years old. They used what we called The Bob Book for first lessons in reading. It was entirely confined to three-letter words and a lot of it concerned a boy called Bob, who could not be called 'good' because of the three-letter limit and so was described as 'not a bad boy'. Tom, who was thin, was 'not fat'. The author's ingenuity was boundless. Later we were promoted to a four-letter word book; there did not seem to be any serious restrictions to its vocabulary, and animals were no longer confined to cat and dog.

When I was about six, cars began to appear on the roads. I remember running along the pavement, trying to keep pace with them – and nearly succeeding. They were, of course, always breaking down; and a very popular comedian, Harry Tate, won great applause for his music-hall turn based on the motorist's troubles. I even saw that, as we were allowed to go to the Hippodrome because it had an arena as well as a stage, and so was half a circus – and circuses were not taboo.

At seven, he came to the end of the series of operations to correct his cleft palate:

The last one took place at Guy's Hospital and I was very proud at being put in a men's ward. One of the men said: 'I know why you're here', to which I replied: 'Yes, I've got a cold.' After that, I had to learn to speak as clearly as possible. The family, especially Ismay, worked hard and I treated the whole thing as a huge joke, but I remember my triumph at being able to produce something like an S, a P and a B.

When I was seven I started school at Dulwich College Prep., where my brother Anstey had been for some time. Thanks to our lessons at home, we were put into relatively high forms, Anstey particularly so. For a prep. school it was large, about 200 boys, and the headmaster was a choleric clergyman, the Rev. J.H. Mallinson ('Mally') who thoroughly believed in the cane. He would often stride into a classroom, regardless of the lesson that was going on, and call out a boy's name. When the boy stood up, he would say: 'You're a very idle boy. I shall cane you, do you hear? Come with me.' The strokes were heard throughout the school. Six was the maximum number, four the average – and on a bare backside they stung a lot.

Latin was the all-important subject. In the top forms Greek was taught too. Maths was also considered of importance, with French, History and Geography in descending order. Dulwich was a famous school for Rugby football and the boys at the Prep. were initiated into the mysteries of that game in the winter terms. In the summer it was, of course, cricket. Part of the Easter term was occupied by athletic sports. Anstey and I used to walk to school, about a mile, and back to lunch, then to school again and back afterwards. Four miles a day – and on Wednesdays and Saturdays, football or cricket as well.

Thanks to the ever-present possibility of the cane and the frequent imposition of 'punishment drill', discipline was well maintained and I don't think that either boys or parents resented these things. One of the masters, an ex-actor, did all he could to instil a love of Shakespeare into the boys, organising visits to the theatre to see Herbert Beerbohm

Tree's productions and even producing scenes from *The Tempest*. I was awarded the part of Trinculo, complete with cap and bells.

Sadly, because of his mother's religious views, Jacob had to miss the trips to the theatre. Jacob had vivid memories of the London street life of his childhood, which enlivened his walks to and from school – much of it providing his earliest musical experiences:

There were barrel organs of different shapes, sizes and sounds, some with dancing dolls on the top, some with monkeys in red caps sitting on them; but the best was the 'piano organ' which had terrific runs and cascades of notes going on against the tune, which would have sounded intolerably dull without them. Sometimes there would even be a dancing bear led on hind legs through the street, accompanied (I think) by a man playing the penny whistle. There were also men pushing their wares in barrows and shouting. Lavender sellers still sang their fascinating tune, traditional for centuries. I remember street singers too, and two men who played clarinet and harp together very fluently and probably picked up a lot of money. There were also 'German bands' which were most exciting.

At home there was music, both live and mechanical. 'The phonograph made its appearance in our home early in the century. The records were cylinders of wax, easily scratched and damaged – later these were made of some plastic material and were harder and less fragile. These records fitted closely on to a metal cylinder which could be made to revolve by clockwork. The reproducer, or soundbox, travelled along the record with an aluminium horn attached. The records played for three minutes or so and were nasal and shrill in tone – the tone was much improved later by means of large horns, suspended from metal stands so that they could swing over easily from side to side, only at a slight angle, as the soundbox to which they were attached travelled along the record. Most of the records were issued by the American Edison Bell Company, which fact was announced on each cylinder. There were songs, sentimental and comic, and Sousa's splendid marches played by his own band. I don't remember any serious music. You could also make your own records, using blank cylinders with a recorder replacing the reproducer. These blank records cost sixpence, I think, and produced great excitement. Charlie sent one home from India one Christmas, and it reached us unbroken with Christmas greetings spoken by him.

While I was at the prep. school, it was decided that I should start piano lessons. Across the road from our house was a kindergarten run by two Victorian ladies, the Misses Sheffield. Miss Eleanor also gave piano lessons to children, and to her I was sent – I think I was eight when I started. She was an excellent teacher and with the aid of Smallwood's Piano Tutor, I got on pretty well. Everything about the piano and music generally was a thrill. The look of the keyboard, the smell of the beeswax with which it was polished, the five lines with their notes and rests and clefs, all contributed to the excitement of it all. It was not long before I was trying to write down little tunes and harmonies. I remember being puzzled by one tune which seemed to be in G and yet wanted the B to be B flat. I didn't yet know about minor keys.

There was plenty of musical stimulation in the Jacob household.

Eva and Ismay had learnt the piano (up to a point) at school and a finishing school in Germany. Lucy and Charlie sang and Eva and Ismay had lessons on guitar and mandolin respectively. Archie also played the piano, Charlie the flute, Anstey the cornet and trumpet and I the piano and autoharp. The latter instrument can play only in the keys of G, D and C and my efforts in the family band were thus rather restricted. I used to beg for a piece in G. My brother Archie was very keen on music and particularly on composing. This gave me encouragement and showed me that music had to be actually written by somebody. Children are usually ignorant of the names of the composers whose music they learn.

As I got a little more proficient, I used to read hymns at sight, and this taught me the rudiments of sound diatonic harmony. There is no better way of acquiring this sort of knowledge, but of course one has to have a good memory for harmonic progressions, so as to be able to reproduce the normal harmonic clichés and modulations. In fact one has to

have an instinctive addiction to such things, so that one's mind is constantly thinking about them, and thus accumulating a store of technical knowledge which is never forgotten or allowed to rust. This musical addiction, which later extends to the study and retention in the mind of orchestral and other full scores, never ceases throughout the life of a composer, whether his work be good or bad. Such is my experience, anyway, and it explains some neglect of ordinary schoolwork – and the impatience of schoolmasters, who could not know that there was anything but sawdust in my head. I'm afraid my school work did not arouse much enthusiasm among my pastors and masters; and 'Mally' poked a lot of rather malicious fun at the idea of my trying for a scholarship to Dulwich. But somehow the examiners were inclined to be kind and I was awarded one.

The most obvious avenue for his talents was to be denied him, it seemed.

In my boyhood, music as a profession was out, firstly because it wasn't done for a gentleman to be a professional musician and secondly because there wasn't apparently much money in it (the first is patently untrue now and the second is much improved). As a matter of fact, the status of musicians in this country had already achieved parity with that of the professions in general, owing to the efforts of Parry, Stanford and others; but my family was blissfully ignorant of the British musical renaissance that was vigorously pursuing its way, helped on by the establishment of the Royal College of Music in 1885 and the Promenade Concerts in 1895, among other things.

My mother and her advisers, who were mostly retired Army or Civil Service, were anxious that I should not be encouraged to the point of wanting to enter the musical profession, and that I should not be discouraged by being made to practise scales and technical exercises. She was a very good woman with a great sense of responsibility for her large family, and anxiety for both their spiritual and physical welfare, but had married young and seemed to have had a rather sketchy education on the intellectual and cultural level. Though she was deeply religious, her faith was not comforting, based as it was on fear of an angry and jealous God who had to be appeased – or else! We tried to avoid being alone with her, as she always seized any opportunity of giving us little moral talks and lectures on misdemeanours lately committed. There was little understanding of her children's doings and interests. She might have been happier and more able to enter into the activities and aspirations of a smaller family, closer together in age. She was 43 when I was born and was therefore always old to me. Widows at that time wore black, or black and grey, which helped them to look prematurely aged.

Dulwich College

In 1908, at the age of 13, I moved on to Dulwich College; and being a scholar, I was placed in a form too high for my real attainments. In these days, anyone showing half the interest I showed in music would be encouraged to develop it, but though music was cultivated there as an extra activity and there were an orchestra, a military band and a choir, all of good school standard, there was hardly any provision for the odd music fan. The masters thought I was an idle good-for-nothing and most of them knew nothing of my musical cravings – or if they did, were only too willing to fall in with my family's wishes that such sinister ambitions should be stifled.

The archetypal Dulwich product was P.G. Wodehouse, who was there from 1894 to 1900; other bestselling authors who went to the school were A.E.W. Mason, C.S. Forester, Dennis Wheatley and Raymond Chandler. This literary tradition was due to Dr Arthur Gilkes, the headmaster in Jacob's time, who was himself a published author and encouraged writers with talent. Gordon Jacob was the only musical alumnus of note, although the critic and musical man-about-town John Amis was at Dulwich rather later.

On the face of it, Jacob was lucky in having H.V. Doulton, a member of the ceramics family, as his form master.

He was a good musician who played piano, organ and trombone and wrote the music for the Greek plays which were a feature of the annual Founder's Day celebrations. He had

been a rigger blue at Oxford and in the running for a cricket blue, so it was not considered cissy to be keen on music; this meant that music was of a pretty high standard, as schools music went in those days.

Though officially one of the classical form masters, Doulton was de facto director of music at Dulwich, taking the school choir, orchestra and military band; but Jacob had mixed memories of him.

He was a choleric man and most of the boys, including me, were scared of him. I stuck in his form for two or three terms, which seemed an eternity. Doulton disliked me because I had little aptitude for Classics, particularly Greek grammar. He was not a good schoolmaster, relying on scolding, blustering and even throwing things about. Not a genial man at all, he was the old-fashioned type, at war with most of the boys under him. Music was no bond between us, though he did suggest that I had percussion lessons so that I could play in the orchestra and band.

Jacob duly learnt timpani and percussion, both invaluable for the future composer.

Later on, when it had been decided that I should give up piano lessons, he advised my mother that I should resume them, which I did. But there was never any personal contact, either when I was in his form or later as a boarder in his house. In justice to Doulton, I must add that the letter in which he advised my mother to let me continue piano lessons was friendly and he was most encouraging in his remarks in general, not only about music.

This letter written on October 10, 1913, read:

Honours are crowding upon the boy this term! School prefect, House prefect, and he appears to be in the running for the 1st XV. I am very glad: He seems to get on now excellently with everyone, and so far as I am concerned is most pleasant. Don't you think it would be a good thing if he took regular music lessons? He is rather apt to get into careless habits, and with his natural ability it seems almost a pity not to make the best of it. If he only had one lesson a week, it would be probably enough to keep him going on the right lines.

Jacob wrote:

I expect there was every excuse for his crossness as no doubt I was pretty intolerable in my behaviour. I did admire the music he wrote for the Greek plays. Scored for such small combinations as flute, horn, harp and strings, it seemed to me then – and still seems to me now – to have been apt and charming. As far as I remember, he did not attempt to set the choruses to music but they were spoken through instrumental music. In my last term, he conducted a piece of mine for orchestra and I also played the first movement of Mozart's *D minor Concerto*, K466, under his conductorship. It was also due to him that I was awarded the *Alleyn Club* prize for music – my only prize at the school – in the shape of Forsyth's *Orchestration*, published that same year and still a classic in its line. It has always been a very valuable help to me.

Another good musician on the staff was W.H. Russell. He was an excellent pianist and sight-reader, accompanied choir rehearsals, played first horn in the orchestra and euphonium in the band. He always spoke to me as a brother musician, which was exactly what I needed. I had piano lessons not from him but from a lazy man who mainly played duets with me. But before that I had lessons from the organist of Christ Church, Gipsy Hill, who encouraged my early efforts at composition. He was a dark little Welshman, Victor Williams by name, who had been a fellow student of Edward German – whose music he admired greatly. He was also a great admirer of Holbrooke, Balfour Gardiner and, of course, Elgar whose early works, such as *Caractacus* and *King Olaf*, he had conducted with his choral societies. I picked up quite a lot of musical tips from him and was able to read orchestral scores with reasonable certainty – and to write them too, thanks to Prout's two-volume *Orchestration* and a few miniature scores.

When I played a new piece to him, he would call out 'Bach', 'Beethoven', 'Wagner' etc. as the inevitable reminiscences arrived. I remember lifting whole passages from the *Good Friday*

Music in Parsifal, which I loved. Composers do that sort of thing nowadays quite unblushingly, but to my generation cribbing was a sign of poverty of invention – and it still is. Williams was a good all-round musician – organist, pianist, conductor and singing teacher. He also wrote a little light music and had a good knowledge of the orchestra. I learnt a lot from him. Once a month or so he used to give a short organ recital after evening service; and at one of these he played a setting I had made of *Ave Maria* – much to my surprise and that of members of the family who were there. My first public performance – what a thrill!

At Dulwich, it was decided that Jacob should move to the science side.

I have always been grateful for this, as it meant that I grew up with a smattering of both classical and scientific learning. I was fascinated by chemistry and physics but was hopeless at mathematics, particularly trigonometry, calculus and dynamics.

At 16 he took his London Matriculation exam, in English, maths, French, Latin and chemistry. By now a strong, stockily built lad, he aspired to win his 1st XV colours at rugby.

The family position in the game was scrum-half and I started there, but I was found to be more useful as a forward (owing to weight) and played several times for the school, though I only got my 2nd XV colours.

Towards the end of my time at school, I became a boarder in Doulton's house. I am glad I had that experience, even for a few terms. During the short time I was a boarder I, being in the Sixth Form but not yet a house or school prefect, and therefore without a study of my own, was allowed to do my prep in the dining room. At the end of the room was a cupboard or small cellar, which H.V.D. used to come in and unlock, emerging with a bottle of wine for dinner. When he was safely ensconced in his dining room I would sometimes, greatly daring, steal into his drawing room where there was a bookshelf full of miniature scores, one of which I would borrow and study to the detriment of prep. Replacing the score was just as dangerous as borrowing it and had to be equally stealthily carried out. One score I particularly remember studying in this way was the *Enigma Variations*, and when in later years I came to hear them, I knew some of the things to look out for. I had already started to collect a few miniature scores at home. The first I ever had was the *Rienzi Overture* of Wagner (you could get overtures and suchlike for sixpence, and classical symphonies for a shilling). Tchaikovsky's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies were bedside books as far as I was concerned, though the C clefs and certain transpositions were sometimes 'taken as read'. B flat and A transpositions were familiarised by Anstey's cornet and trumpet, but the F trumpets in the *Enigma* were a bit daunting to start with.

I made some good friendships at Dulwich, some among the more musical boys. We used to visit each other's homes and make hideous noises trying to play trios, etc. But in those days there was not nearly so much interest in learning wind and string instruments as there is now. A boy in Doulton's house, R.F.H. Nalder, was extremely gifted musically and was sufficiently keen to get an orchestra together, two years running, from members of the school orchestra to give a concert during the Christmas holidays. He wrote pieces which were played at these, and I conducted two pieces of my own. Nalder went into the regular Army and reached the rank of major-general. I remember him writing an *Ouverture militaire*, which evidently enshrined his two loves of music and the Army – it was still a tendency to give pieces foreign titles. Following my teacher's Edward German addiction, I wrote a *Valse gracieuse*.

This was the piece played by the Dulwich orchestra at Jacob's last school concert in July 1914 – the same at which he 'bungled through' the Mozart concerto movement, inserting '... a cadenza by Busoni, with the difficult bits re-edited by me'.

Gordon Jacob was growing up in the last great heyday of Romantic orchestration. Some of the music he experienced at school has gone out of fashion and the Baroque and

high Classical periods were not well represented, but much of what he heard or performed was grist to the mill of a budding expert in orchestration.

In the school orchestra we played in choral works like *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, *The Revenge*, *Messiah*, *St Paul*, *Elijah* and *The Wedding of Shou McLean* (an amusing piece by Hubert Bath, in which hiccups were represented by strings playing the wrong side of the bridge). *Lord Ullen's Daughter* by Hamish McCunn was another exciting piece and of course Parry's *The Pied Piper* was much enjoyed. It must have been quite new then. I think we did *Blest Pair of Syrens* too. I have always loved old scores, and one day I came across what may almost have been a first edition of *The Creation* in the music rooms – a great, fat volume with lovely big notes. I remember being struck by one number in which only one kettledrum was used. 'Timpano in C' said the score.

As orchestral pieces we played *The Mastersingers Prelude*, the march from *Tannhäuser*, the slow movement of the Tchaikovsky Fifth, *Järnefelt's Praeludium* (then new), the *Hansel and Gretel Overture*, the *Magic Flute Overture* and so on. I remember playing the last-named (as timpanist) from old band-parts with no rehearsal letters, and having to count 125 bars' rest with no cues either. Another piece we played was the *Freischütz Overture* which, like *Hansel and Gretel*, showed up our quartet of horns. When a new assistant master arrived who was a good pianist, we played some concerto movements. He was a useful young man who could also play viola and trombone; and we played an overture by him on one occasion.

In addition there were the light pieces and marches performed by the military band – in which Jacob 'attempted' to play the side drum. He wrote:

I owe much to the musical side of Dulwich and to Doulton, Russell, A.N. Wight, Burgess and Cummings the brass teacher – who was once carried, playing his cornet, by Blondin the tightrope walker, right across the centre transept of the Crystal Palace at a great height.

So he left school with more to show for his time there than the rather sparse 'character' written for him by the headmaster and dated May 23, 1914:

I have pleasure in saying that G.P.S. Jacob, who has been at Dulwich College for nearly six years, bears a good character. *A.H. Gilkes*

High Days and Holidays

In Gordon Jacob's youth, much of the musical life of London revolved round the Crystal Palace, which had been designed by Sir Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition of 1851 and later transferred from Hyde Park to Sydenham Hill, where it became a much-loved landmark until its destruction by fire in 1936. Jacob had fond recollections of the massive structure:

Actually one end was at the top of Sydenham Hill and the other at the top of Anerley Hill in Upper Norwood, where we lived. The building stretched the whole length of what is still called Crystal Palace Parade and was entirely of glass supported by a skeleton of cast iron. At each end there was an extremely tall tower and between these the main building lay, with a great semi-circular bulge in the roof halfway along its length. The middle part, under the bulge, contained the Central Transept, where the Handel Festivals were held, and the great organ. In letters of gold each side of the organ were the names of Handel's oratorios extending in ribbon formation halfway round the transept. They made an impressive show with their tremendous biblical titles: *Samson*, *Judas Maccabeus*, *Israel in Egypt*, *Messiah*, *Deborah*, *Jephtha* and so on.

In my day the Handel Festivals were conducted by Sir Frederic Cowen, with a choir of about 4,000 and a large orchestra for which special orchestrations were made by Sir Henry Wood. They were enormously successful and I actually heard Sir Charles Santley sing *Honour and Arms* in a most virile manner – somewhere about 1910, I suppose, when he was well into his 70s. His fire and energy were still to be felt. Clara Butt's voice had no trouble in filling the vast space of the centre transept and Robert Radford was another of whom that could be said. These festivals would of course have been frowned on in these

days, when baroque music has to be performed as nearly as possible as it was when it was written. But they served their purpose in keeping alive the memory of Handel, by presenting his music with a grandeur and devotion that cannot be denied. He would have loved it!

Jacob was writing before the dominance of 'original instruments' was established – he would probably not have felt in harmony with this trend. The future orchestrator was catered for as well:

During the second half of the 19th Century and up to 1901, August Manns conducted his famous concerts in the concert hall at the Palace. Until the Proms started in 1895, the year of my birth, these were practically the only orchestral concerts in London. Many British composers, such as Parry, Stanford, Elgar, Cowen and Mackenzie, had first performances there, so the Palace had a great deal to do with the English musical renaissance. Elgar saved up to come up to London from Worcester in his young days, to hear Manns's orchestra, and learnt much about orchestral writing from these visits. There were also military band and popular concerts, and organ recitals were frequently given by the resident organist – Walter W. Hedgcock I remember in particular. One of my earliest recollections is of climbing into the bandstand to look at the string bass parts, which I thought would show lots of leger lines below the bass stave. But alas, their parts are written an octave higher than the sounds, and they looked quite ordinary.

There were many joys besides musical ones ... penny-in-the-slot machines galore, Punch and Judy, sideshows in plenty including short films, very dot-and-dashy ... the entrance fee to the Palace was sixpence and the number of pennies needed for slot machines and sideshows was legion. There were numerous visits by circus organisations including turns which looked deliciously dangerous – like Flying the Flame, in which a cyclist sped down a narrow, sloping track and leaped across a wide space on to an equally narrow track the other side, or Looping the Loop, in which he was for an instant upside-down; and acrobats performed incredible feats of strength and balance. There was also a large roller-skating rink, but we hardly ever went on it, preferring a ride by bike to Brixton and a much cheaper rink. There were many plaster reproductions of classical sculpture and busts of the famous, an Egyptian Court – full of mummies and mystery – Assyrian bull-men and so on, awesome for a child. When I was very young and we sang *Pleasant are Thy courts above* in church, I always pictured the Egyptian and Assyrian Courts and the whole place was mixed up with vague ideas of heaven. In the extensive grounds were a water-chute, a great wheel and other thrills, a building containing tableaux illustrating the *Siege of Paris* (we never wasted money on that!), huge stone prehistoric monsters... There were weekly firework displays by Brock's and their benefit night was tremendous, with great set-piece portraits of royalty. From our house in Victoria Road we could see the rockets ascend and burst; and sometimes the family would actually go and watch the show in the Palace grounds, as a special treat.

There was a cricket club, too, with a good second-class team. Several times we saw the great W.G. Grace play there, after he got too old for county cricket. It is a great privilege to have seen this tall, impressive figure, with his bushy beard and burly frame, bowling his famous off and leg-breaks and knocking up high scores. Anstey and I were keen on watching cricket at one time and used to go and watch the Surrey team play at the Oval. This was in the palmy days of Hayward, Hobbs, N. A. Knox and so on. Knox, an Old Alleyntian, was a demon fast bowler. I used to enjoy seeing him go in to bat (usually last wicket); he was a slogger – hit or miss. I can hardly believe it, but I think I saw him score 26 in one over; this would involve five fours and a six. I remember G.L. Jessup, too, a famous Gloucester bat. He played with an almost horizontal bat and was a very hard hitter and popular with the crowd. He had a curious crouching stance.

The first big excitement in the Jacob family year, once the winter was over, was Easter:

In the Easter holidays it was for many years the regular thing for as many of us as possible to spend two or three weeks in Suffolk. My aunt Amy (my mother's sister) had married Alfred Bloomfield, an officer in a Gurkha regiment – he was a very short but very tough little man, and when he retired had gone to live in the country at Glemham, about four

miles from Saxmundham in Suffolk. Some of my happiest early memories are of that lovely house and the country in which it stood. It was called Glemham Grove then. My uncle had done a lot of shooting in India and the house was full (as was the fashion of the time) of skins, skulls and stuffed heads of animals, as well as Indian weapons of war. He did not shoot for the sake of shooting, but mostly to rid a district of some predatory beast which was killing the natives and destroying their villages and farm animals. The staircase was adorned with the enormous skull of an elephant, a rogue, which had spread terror over a large area. He hunted it for about six weeks. At last he tracked it down one early morning, resting in long grass, and as it raised its head, he killed it with one shot through the eye. This was in 1863, when fire-arms were still muzzle-loaders, with a kick like a horse, and you had to do the job with the first shot. My uncle was lame from an encounter with a large bear, which he shot at point-blank range as it came towering towards him on its hind legs; it fell partly on him, breaking one of his legs. He could tell of his adventures very dramatically and keep us enthralled. I first went to that magic place when I was three, and could not quite reach far enough over the landing bannisters to touch the end of the elephant's tusks – I managed it the following year.

There was a small farmyard, where chickens ran free and the horses had their stables; and there were barns and an estate carpenter, Mr Boast, who made some lovely stilts for Anstey and me. The nightingales used to sing all night long on warm spring nights, keeping everyone awake, so near the house were they. We children ran wild wherever we liked; there was a winding stream nearby and woods and fields about the house. The hedges were full of nests, from which we were in honour bound not to take more than one egg.

There was always a trip to Aldeburgh in the wagonette. Sometimes we went to Dunwich, where erosion had reached yet another churchyard and bones lay on the beach. A number of churches were within walking distance – the coachman and horses had to be left undisturbed on Sundays. The house was in the parish of Great Glemham, but my aunt did not feel obliged to go there exclusively and we often went elsewhere, to Rendham or Sweffling or across the fields to Benhall. The churches were lovely old buildings, well looked after. I visited that district not long ago and it had not changed much in 70 or 80 years. In Great Glemham Church was a tablet in memory of the organist of my young days. All the time that I knew the church, she struggled with the same voluntary and made the same mistakes on the long-suffering harmonium. All the churches were served by harmoniums (or 'American organs'), played with varying success. As we were always there at Easter-tide, the churches were beautifully decorated with spring flowers. My uncle and aunt were particularly friendly with the vicar of Sweffling and she did a lot of the Easter decorations, sometimes wickedly putting something prickly at the front of the pulpit, which he had the habit of grasping when he got worked up. She was full of fun and with her fluent Hindustani, could be taken for an Indian when she put on some of the native dresses she had brought back. She and her husband were great fun and called some of us by Hindustani nicknames – Hindustani was bandied about as it was in all Anglo-Indian households. During the war my uncle died and the house was sold. As he had died intestate, she was left almost penniless and had to get a wartime job in the Bank of England to make ends meet. It was a sad end to a happy and eventful life.

Summer holidays loomed even larger in the young Jacob's life:

Private motoring was still the prerogative of the rich and was attended by considerable discomfort, with open cars, dusty and bumpy roads and frequent breakdowns, with no convenient garage just round the corner. Most people were unable to travel far from their homes except by train. Summer holidays by the sea were therefore much more exciting than they are today. The train journey itself was part of the thrill and the first sight of the sea was greeted with squawks of delight. I remember holidays at Robin Hood's Bay (on a farm – great joy!) on the south coast; on the east coast; and on the Isle of Wight. Rooms in lodging houses were booked for two or three weeks in September, which was cheaper than August, and for several years the east coast was in favour. Hunstanton, Mundesley and Sheringham were often chosen and Sheringham was particularly popular. One excitement was to run along by the sea wall at high tide between waves, which splashed all over you if

you were caught by one, and we used to get soaked. My sisters liked talking to the fishermen, whom they called 'nature's gentlemen', and we all enjoyed bathing, walking on the cliffside to Cromer, and crab for supper. The lodgings were redolent of cooking cabbage and linoleum and usually had a rather faded yellow wallpaper in the entrance hall. When Anstey and I were very small, we sometimes had to share a double bed with a bolster between us. Sanitary necessities were provided, usually, by an earth closet at the end of the garden in which very large black slugs seemed to be permanent residents. But I don't remember the food being scarce and we had plenty of fun.

An early seaside memory was staying at Hunstanton in a semi-detached house. In the evening an old man next door regaled his grandchildren with eerie tales as they sat in the front garden. One phrase remains in my memory: 'Her face was as yellow as a guinea.' Someone found out that he was none other than A.R. Gaul, who had written oratorios for the festivals which at that time provided British composers with their principal outlets. One of Gaul's works, *The Holy City*, achieved considerable success in Victorian days. A piano was hired and installed in our lodgings and used by the older members of the family. Mr Gaul used to play every morning Schumann's Novelette in D minor – never anything else. In a large house not far away, Ben Davies, a well-known tenor, could be heard practising. I also remember being locked up and left in a greenhouse, as a punishment for some misdemeanour, while the rest of the family went to the beach. This sounds cruel, but those were stern days.

One year it rained incessantly and we were all miserably obliged to stay indoors. As a family we were inclined to argument and I remember vividly one that seems in retrospect to have lasted all day, between my eldest sister Eva and my fifth brother Archie. She was for Charles I (she always had Anglo-Catholic leanings) and he for Cromwell, probably more for the sake of argument than from conviction. It was still going on at bedtime, with Eva, candle in hand, halfway up the stairs and Archie standing in the hall. This holiday, made disastrous by the weather, which always tended to be wet and chilly on the east coast in September, was decisive. In future our September fortnight or so would be spent on the south coast. The Isle of Wight was chosen and we had many happy times at Sandown and Shanklin, where it was usually sunny and warm.

Bembridge on the Isle of Wight was the site of the camps to which Anstey and Gordon were sent:

... two or three years running. My mother was told of camping holidays for public school boys on the island. They were run by a religious organisation and officered mainly by undergraduates who were reading for holy orders and wanted preaching practice. A splendid idea, thought she, good for the soul as well as the body. We were under canvas and the weather always seemed to be good. The camp was near the top of the cliff, which could be descended by a path to the beach, so there was much bathing and rowing for those who liked it. There was a morning service every day with a sermon, and a longer one in the evening with two or three sermons by the earnest young undergraduates. I remember one of them telling us we were all going to hell, the whole lot of us. I was about ten, I suppose, and Anstey 12. On Sunday nights we had addresses which skated round the facts of life, one of which was given by Bishop Taylor-Smith, Chaplain-General to the Forces, an alarming address on the dangers of over-indulgence in sex. I remember being rather scared by these Sunday nights, but they were less boring than the weekday addresses – Anstey, being older, knew better than I what the Sunday talks were about, but he didn't discuss them with me.

At one camp an accident occurred which had a long-term effect on his musical career:

I cut the main tendon of the little finger of my left hand, while cleaning a knife by pushing it into the ground. It was stitched up but the tendon was irretrievably cut (anyway no attempt was made to join it together again); and it has prevented me from being much good at the piano and from ever learning to play a string instrument.

He could, like his contemporary Rudolf Kolisch, injured in a similar childhood accident, have learnt to play the violin, viola or cello holding the bow in the left hand and

fingering with the right; but this stratagem clearly never occurred to anyone. As we have seen, he was already unable to blow a wind or brass instrument.

So this accident put paid to any possibility of becoming an efficient performer on any musical instrument – though I went on with piano lessons, I am glad to say, as the keyboard is the best, almost the only, means of learning the principles of harmony, the lay-out of chords and so on, and of experimenting with modulation. My ability as a pianist is pretty dismal, but I have always used and needed the help of the piano in composition and arrangement.

In later life Jacob was inclined to take a philosophical view of his physical limitations.

I think these inabilityes were an important psychological factor lying behind my compulsive interest in musical instruments and everything connected with them, even as far as fascination with the scent of beeswax used for polishing the piano. If I could not play instruments, I must find out as much of their technique as a non-player could.

And he did find out, so that he was never nonplussed by having to write for an instrument, whether it was the mouth organ, the tuba or the viola.

A summer holiday saw the last of Jacob's youth, before maturity was thrust on him and so many other boys of his generation.

In the summer of 1914 I went (with Lucy only, for some reason) to Morteohoe and Woolacombe in North Devon. I had just left school and had sat for the Inter B. Sc. at London. While on holiday I heard with little surprise that I had failed, except in Chemistry and Physics. Lucy was very good and sympathetic – she realised that I ought to have been allowed to make music my career. There happened to be staying in Morteohoe a school friend named Beer, who had been in the school O.T.C. and had passed 'Certificate A'. Soon after war was declared, he and I were enjoying a sea bathe when he said: 'I suppose we'll have to join up.' We both cut our holiday short so as to get home and do this. He was eligible for a commission and got one at once. A little more than a year later, he was dead.

King, Country and Muse

Jacob arrived home to find London in the grip of war fever. In his old age he wrote:

It is easy to dismiss as naive, or even ignoble, the love of country, but rightly or wrongly it bore us all along on great waves of excitement and fine feeling. I joined up on August 26, 1914 in the Royal Field Artillery, where I was told that 'educated men' were needed. They may have been 'needed', but that was as far as it went. I enlisted and was sworn in at Wimbledon. Soldiers took the oath of loyalty and service on the Bible. To save time, two did so together, both holding the same Bible – I had it in my right hand and my companion held it in his left. He had evidently been bidding his friends and family farewell with liberal potatoes, and it was all I could do to help him stand up straight – a difficult job to do with nothing but a small Bible. Though he swayed, he kept on his feet; but I have often wondered whether he realised what he'd done when sobriety returned next morning, plus hangover!

I spent one night in Woolwich Barracks, where I picked up lice, taking them with me to Shorncliffe Camp, near Folkestone, the next day. Thus I early learned that the louse was the military parasite par excellence, rather than the bug or flea.

At Shorncliffe on the South Downs above Sandgate, Jacob and his *confrères* were housed not in the permanent barrack buildings, but in bell tents.

I don't know how many men would be able to sleep comfortably in one of these, but I do know that 15 are a tight fit! We had no guns and no uniforms and many of the men were soon in tattered garments.

On October 2, he wrote home to his mother:

The authorities seem to have a sense of humour. They dished us out with spurs yesterday, which don't look quite right somehow with mufti.

Jacob recalled:

Before I left we were fitted out in 'Kitchener's blue' uniform, with little forage caps and red piping – were they, perhaps, surplus from the South African campaigns? Our officers and NCOs were mostly regulars and did not treat us as heroes for having enlisted. One cannot blame them, as we were a pretty sorry lot. Some were criminals, and 'cracked cribs' in Sandgate, and all were rough, uncouth fellows, mostly from London's East End. I sensed that they were extremely conscious of class distinctions and was careful to try to be 'one of them'. It was all a tremendous eye-opener to me. One of the men in my tent, a very nice chap and a farm hand, could not read or write. There were a good number of fisticuff fights and one man murdered another with a tent mallet. Some cases were punished by terms of imprisonment in the dreaded 'glass house' at Aldershot, to be followed by 'discharge with ignominy' – this last word received a variety of pronunciations. Men were given their sentences in front of the whole brigade drawn up in a square, and their regimental badges were removed from uniforms and caps. It was all rather impressive. I suppose that sort of thing was discontinued after a short while, because the Army couldn't afford to lose men in that way, when they could be used as cannon fodder. But in spite of the roughness of behaviour and language, the majority of the chaps were kind and good at heart and there was an excellent feeling of comradeship.

Fortunately the weather was mostly warm and we were allowed the option of sea bathing in the early morning, instead of PT. No one had bathing trunks, so we went in without – it helped to freshen us up no end and was good for lice bites. As there was no artillery equipment, we did squad drill all day, though the lightweights who were assigned to 'driver' duties went through it in the riding school, where things were very tough. Our pay was 7s a week which sounds very meagre, but good cigarettes were only 3d for ten and the cheapest were 1d for five. Beer was 3d a pint in the canteen and an evening meal of sausages and mash could be bought for a few pence, to supplement the ample but dull daily rations. Good pipe tobacco was 4d an ounce and some was quite good at 3d, so 1s a day could buy quite a lot. While I was with this unit, I learnt how to eat fish and chips from newspaper, while walking in the street.

In the evenings, Jacob frequented the YMCA at Sandgate, where he could read papers and magazines or buy a cheap meal.

There was also a piano, which I used to play when the place was practically empty. One of the men in my tent had evidently heard me banging away, for one night, after lights out, a sleepy voice announced: 'I don't want to mention no nimes, but there's a ----- in this 'ere ---- tent what can't 'arf ply the ----- piano like ----- clockwork.' My modest keyboard skill resulted in my being ordered to play a harmonium at church parade on Sundays. Before these services, a sergeant-major would bawl out: 'C of E on the right, RCs on the left, fancy religions...' Well, I don't know where they went, but they were dealt with somehow.

Jacob made other musical observations, of a less divine kind.

There was a roller skating rink on Folkestone pier which was fun when you could afford it, and had the added attraction of a beery old chap, very fat, who sang in stentorian tones:

Sons of the brave
All British born,
(something, something, something)
Laughing foes to scorn...

This ended with the ennobling lines:

But you can't beat the boys of the old brigade
That made old England's name.

There was another about marching 'steadily shoulder to shoulder, steadily blade by blade' – and other equally uplifting ditties.

Near our camp were barracks inhabited by the Royal Horse Artillery. I should think they were regulars, as they had a good set of buglers. I had never heard E flat cavalry trumpets

before, and it was thrilling to hear them in calls like Stables, going up through the eighth and ninth harmonics to the tenth. The ordinary infantry bugle in B flat cannot get beyond the sixth harmonic and its low pitch makes it far less brilliant. *The Last Post*, all the same, never fails to bring tears to the eyes when well played on the latter.

Another musical ear-opener was hearing his first string quartet concert, at Epsom Town Hall, including Dvorák's *American Quartet*, which he described as 'a most exciting experience'. This came about because he transferred after two months to the newly formed University and Public School Brigade of the Royal Fusiliers.

I found myself at Epsom, quite near home at Wimbledon, as a private in the 18th Battalion. A new camp was being built at Woodcote Park and until that was finished we were in billets, well looked after by the local inhabitants. Several old Dulwich boys, some of whom I knew, were there and I played ruggier in the C Company team. We drilled on the Epsom Recreation Ground and went for pleasant route marches through the Surrey countryside. Although the two months at Shorncliffe had been an experience with a decidedly funny side, it was a relief to have more congenial companions, who shared the same sort of background and spoke the same sort of language – good and bad! While at Epsom, we made periodic visits by train to Caterham, where we trudged up the steep hill to the downland above, and dug trenches for the outer defences of London. They commanded wonderful views.

After a bit we moved into Woodcote Park camp, consisting of wooden huts and giving more communal life. A bugle band was attached to the battalion and, as the sergeant was an old Dulwich boy who knew my musical proclivities and my drumming efforts at school, I soon found myself a drummer. This did not interfere with general military training, but did enable one to avoid some unpleasant fatigue duties and parades. The buglers also learnt to play fifes and I had to write extra parts, so that they could play their tunes in harmony.

This percussive interlude lasted only until May 1915, when his unit moved to Clipstone Camp near Mansfield. On May 17, he wrote home:

The place looked as if it was about the last part of creation to be turned out, and as if it had been raining ever since that unfortunate event ... the huts looked very poor substitutes for our palaces at Woodcote. Instead of our spring mattress beds we now have to sleep on three boards supported by two bits of wood, one at each end, and standing about three inches from the floor. We have a canvas mattress and pillow stuffed with straw, and three blankets each. The floor has huge cracks in it, through which one can see the green grass beneath. It reminds one of standing on a pier and seeing the water between the planks. A chery place, I can tell you, especially in wet weather!

Here he contracted mumps, was given a week's leave to convalesce, then had a bad bout of colic through drinking too much cold water after a gruelling route march. But he did not lose his sense of humour – in July he wrote saying, among other things concerning life in camp:

Pyjamas I cannot wear as no one else does. I must not be different. With regard to the dirty shirt I return, I suggest the following treatment: Avert the face, holding the prominent feature firmly between the thumb and index finger of the right hand, having previously prepared a cauldron of boiling water with as tightly fitting a lid as possible, compatible with security from explosion. Grasp the filthy piece of drapery in the left hand and quickly transfer to the cauldron, replacing the lid *prestissimo*. Boil vigorously for 24 hours, and all may be well ... I have not yet gone to the de-il, so don't be anxious.

Somehow Jacob had been finding time to compose; and in an undated letter from Clipstone he told his mother:

I wrote to Sir Henry Newbolt on Saturday for permission to publish the song. I hope he will grant it. It seems rather cheek, writing to such a great man, but there's no harm in trying. He may want to see the music first but if he does, I think he ought to pass it all right, as it seems to me it expresses the feeling of the poem right enough. I think the conditions are

quite good ... I don't know how long such things take, but it ought to be out in a few weeks, provided old Newbolt is favourable. If he isn't, I shall run him down for the rest of my life.

By July 21 'old Newbolt', the most popular poet in the country, had given his consent; and on 26 July the publishers West & Company sent Jacob a memorandum of agreement relating to the song *By the Hearthstone*. In return for his paying £4 5s 6d, they agreed to engrave, print and publish his song, paying him royalties on all copies sold, '... with the reservation that every seventh copy shall be free from royalty in conformity with the custom of the trade of reckoning 14 to the dozen'. Jacob's royalty would be sixpence per copy, until the total reached the amount he had paid, and threepence thereafter. He would receive 25 free copies, 1d royalty on each copy sold for export and half of any royalties for mechanical reproduction. He assigned his 'full right and title' to the song to West and Company. It was his first published work – but it is now lost, unless a printed copy turns up. Just a few days later, Jacob was off with his battalion to Tidworth on Salisbury Plain, to be prepared for active service as an ordinary infantryman.

We were kept busy at Tidworth with 'ops' by day and night. Two companions and I got lost on one occasion and as night was falling, found a farm cart in a shed and had quite a good sleep in it. We managed to find our way back to barracks in the morning and were given CB (confined to barracks) for a week. The CO in sentencing us said: 'If you had been on active service, you might have been shot for desertion'.

In the canteen was a long-suffering piano which I played quite a lot. In the evenings pint pots decorated its top in large numbers. I used to try to accompany 'vocalists' who expected me to vamp extempore accompaniments after humming me the tune, not always very accurately. The songs used to get more and more sentimental as the evenings wore on; and the pianist got a number of free drinks. When the weather was dry and warm I took the action out of the piano, as the notes were inclined to stick, and dried the beer out of it. This was only moderately successful but prevented the instrument from seizing up completely. For a week or two I earned a few welcome extra shillings by playing percussion in the orchestra for some special show at the Garrison Theatre.

On Guy Fawkes Day, November 5, Jacob learned that he was soon to be facing something more serious than fireworks. He wrote to his mother:

I think we are going abroad within the next week ... I don't know what our destination will be, but it will most probably be France. I hope so, anyway ... I wonder if you could let me have some socks. It's no good taking much out, but what one does take has to be useful. Another rather useful thing, I believe, is morphine, also very tiny editions of Omar Khayyam and Tennyson, etc. I have just sent off the corrected proofs of the song, which fortunately arrived in time for me to do them.

Years later, Jacob described their departure for France:

Then one night we had to parade with full kit. This was it. We were taken to Dover and embarked for France. A day or two before that, we were allowed to invite wives or relatives to come and say goodbye. My mother came down and we had rather a gloomy tea together, not knowing what to say – which wasn't really very surprising. The battalion was quite glad that training was at last over – it had seemed very long, though not much over a year – and in our ignorance, we looked forward to active service and helping to 'finish the war'.

Tully Potter

(Part 2 of Tully Potter's account of Gordon Jacob's fascinating journey will be published in the December 2014 issue of *British Music*)