

## Holst Among Friends : afterthoughts

*Alan Gibbs*

The interest my book *Holst Among Friends* (Thames Publishing) aroused (cf review in *BMS News* 86, June 2000) suggests that a little judicious amplification and updating may be welcome. Anyone who purchased the original edition may be grateful to know of some errors which were corrected in a Second Impression. Relevant page numbers are given in brackets.

[1] "A little man": Holst's passport at the age of forty-four records him as 5ft 6ins tall, with blue eyes, fair hair and a fresh complexion (Holst Birthplace Museum).

[13] Helen Wilkins does not remember her father Edgar as being a pupil of Holst.

[14] Michael Goatcher has identified the Piper's Dance as *The New Rigged Ship*.

[17] John Farmer composed the melody to *Forty Years On*. A Harrovian recalled that as musical director Farmer "*did not merely teach Music. He modified profoundly the whole life of the school. It is mainly to him that Harrow owes the vigorous singing in Chapel and the heartiness of the school concerts... The inimitable vigour with which [he] led the revels, his jokes, always manly and good humoured, his keen enjoyment and his spirits always boyish...*" (J Fisher Williams, in *Harrow*, published Bell 1901). It is tempting to think that Holst did, indeed, meet this rôle-model!

[26] Jane Joseph attended Norland Place School.

[29] Jane's great-nephew, John Sanderson, has found her vocal score of *The Hymn of Jesus* with this characteristically over-the-top inscription in Holst's writing :

May the Illustrious Twice Born and  
Exceedingly Educated and Excessively Virtuous  
Teacher of the Holy Tongue of the Ancients  
stoop down from lofty heights and  
deign to accept  
this offering  
from

The Low Born Disreputable Highly Vicious and  
Unworthy-to-be-regarded-with-aught-but-scorn  
Pupil.

And May the God of Fortune even the Superlatively  
Amiable Ganesha, gently waving his trunk,  
surrounded by dancing maidens, each bearing  
gifts of immeasurable wealth, take up his abode  
on your doorstep from whence the lotus shall arise  
fountains shall spring up, the walls shout for joy and  
all who behold shall be transported!

(None of this is not quite accurate but it is the best I can do)

Gustav Holst's inscription on the vocal score of *The Hymn of Jesus*  
which he gave to Jane Joseph in gratitude for her assistance.

Reproduced by courtesy of John Sanderson.

May the Illustrious Twice Born and  
Exceedingly Educated and Excessively Virtuous  
Teacher of the Holy Tongue of the Ancients  
stoop down from lofty heights and  
deign to accept  
this offering  
from

The Low Born Disreputable Highly Vicious and  
Unworthy-to-be-regarded-with-aught-but-scorn  
Pupil.

*And May the God of Fortune even the Superlatively  
Amiable Gonesha, gently waving his trunk,  
surrounded by dancing maidens, each bearing  
gifts of immeasurable wealth, take up his abode  
on your doorstep from whence the lotus shall arise,  
fountains shall spring up, the walls shout for joy and  
all who behold shall be transported.*

*(Some of this is not quite accurate but it is the best I can do)*

Gonesha is the elephant-headed Hindu God of Foresight: quite what he has to do with *The Hymn of Jesus* is not immediately apparent!

[30] Eothen School was founded in 1892.

[31] Imogen's dance took place in Dulwich, but not at JAGS (cf page 115).

[33] Sylvia Heath recalls that her father, Jack Putterill, offered to coach her mother, Barbara (née Noel), on the cello, not the violin. She has many happy memories of Thaxted music and dancing and possesses a very courteous invitation she received as a little girl in about 1929 :

Dear Miss Putterill

Eve Steppes  
March 13

You do not know me and I fear I should  
hardly know you if we met in a crowd.  
I humbly desire your better acquaintance and therefore Beg  
you to join me in a Dish of Tea this afternoon and to Bring  
with you your Reverend Mother and any other Esteemed Female  
Relative you happen to have on the Premises.

Yours to Obey  
Lustan Holot

Ye Steppes  
March 13

Dear Miss Putterill

You do not know me and I fear I should  
hardly know you if we met in a crowd.

I humbly Desire your better Acquaintance and therefore Beg  
you to join me in a Dish of Tea this afternoon and to Bring  
with you your Reverend Mother and any other Esteemed Female  
Relative you happen to have on the Premises.

Yours to Obey

Gustav Holst

By then the Holsts were living at Great Easton: Gustav was evidently a visitor at their old home in Thaxted, *The Steps*, for the day. Sylvia's husband, Desmond Heath, has compiled a fascinating book about her poet great-grandfather, *Roden Noel 1834-94: a wide angle* (DB Books, 60 Esmond Road, London W4 13F, 1998). It contains much information about the Noel family, including Conrad, and photographs of Barbara (dedication page) and Holst with Miriam and Barbara (page 259).

[47] Jane had already marked Holst's forty-ninth birthday by composing a brief four-part choral *Slogan No.2* (the RVW tribute of the previous year is headed *Slogan*) with the inscription 'Ad Festa Natalicia Gustavii Holstii' (RCM MS 4555). The text welcomes his return after having "travell'd far into the West, / Bringing the blessing of joyous song / To a waiting nation", i.e. America! She uses a Holst-like scale, minor with Phrygian and Lydian inflexions.

[51] Holst's reaction to Jane's death is found in a letter to Isobel of March 12th : "it is a great blow and I'm trying not to be too selfish about it". This is one of the many extracts and whole letters quoted in Jon C Mitchell's readable *A Comprehensive Biography of Composer Gustav Holst with Correspondence and Diary Excerpts including his American Years* (Edward Mellen Press). It is nice to know where we can find full details of Holst's American visits and friends. Sadly, no further light is thrown on the missing film score, *The Bells*, which finished up in the USA: did Holst's polytonality take on Ives dimensions when two bands, 'playing their own tunes, marched from different directions and came together'? On page 371 is Holst's letter to Vally Lasker discussing his projected article on Jane's music. But the high price (£100) will deter would-be readers and even libraries; so will the many obvious errors and mis-spellings.

[52] Dora Arnold remembers Jane as 'a big girl, always kind and helpful'

and 'a lovely person', on one occasion insisting on carrying a heavy faggot of kindling for Dora's mother (Michael Goatcher, the leading Thaxted authority, in interview with Dora, September 22nd 1998). A photograph of Jane at her piano appears in Paul Holmes's *Holst: his life and times* (Omnibus Press, 1997), page 66.

[55] *A Little Childe there is ibore* was performed at a Macnaghten-Lemare concert on December 12th 1932. Britten played in his own music at the same concert (cf *Letters from a Life* Volume 1, edited Mitchell and Reed, Faber 1991/98, page 293).

[57] I detect a 'Holstian' thumbprint in bar 6 of Example 5 — a turn of phrase to be heard later in *Egdon Heath* (bar 61) and *A Moorside Suite* (II, bars 2-3).

[58] The scoring of *Village Dance* also includes strings.

[66] Rosamund Strode confirms that Imogen was born at 31 Grena Road, although the Holsts lived for a short time at No.23.

[67] Paycockes is in Coggeshall (pronounced locally 'Cogger-shawl'), not Thaxted.

[74] Morris dancing was associated with Whitsun, hence Shakespeare : "And let us do it with no show of fear: / No, with no more than if we heard that England / Were busied with a Whitsun morris-dance" (*Henry V*, II 4, cf *Grove V*, III page 232). Thaxted is still a lively centre: over 180 dancers performed in the town and surrounding villages at the 290th Morris Ring Meeting in June 2002.

[76] Byrd was not born in Essex, but almost certainly London (Richard Turbet, editor of the Annual Byrd Newsletter, refers me to Harley's 1997 biography). However, he spent his last years at Stondon Massey in Essex.

[85] Gibbons's Amen is in five parts, SSATB.

[88] Richard Turbet writes that 'the Magnificat is set to the full sections of Byrd's festal psalm *Teach me O Lord*. The Nunc Dimittis is set to his festal psalm *Hear my prayer O God*' (cf *The Byrd Edition*, Volume 10a).

[95] Clive Carey collected morris dances and folk songs and was Music Director of Mary Neale's Esperance Club (cf page 68).

[98] *Orpheus* Act II was favoured by choral groups, eg Allen Gill conducted LCC Choral Unions in performances back in 1910 (cf *The School Music Review*, October 1st 1909).

- [113] For *Sirac* read *Sirach*. But Holst's mention (1918) pre-dates publication of RVW's setting by five years.
- [114] S Wesley's *Sing aloud* should be listed under 1917, not 1916.
- [154] The Walenns formed a family quartet (Gerald, Arthur and Herbert with Dorothea), which gave twenty-nine recitals for the South Place Sunday Popular Concerts from 1888 to 1897 (F Hawkins: *A Hundred Years of Chamber Music*, published by South Place Ethical Society 1987).
- [161] Joan Cross played the violin at SPGS. "*I was in the back row of the orchestra. [Holst] used to peer at me there, and it was rather frightening, I suppose!*" But "*I couldn't stand violin, and my mother was anxious that I should be a violinist*". She won a scholarship to TCM in the instrument but eventually persuaded the Principal to allow her to change to singing under Dawson Freer, through whom she secured an audition with Lilian Bayliss and a place in the chorus at the Old Vic (interview with Richard Baker for BBC Radio, 1990).
- [170] Michael Short writes that 2 Elm Crescent, Ealing, where Holst stayed to recover after his relapse in March 1934, was Mabel Rodwell Jones's address.
- [173] Barbara Britten was subsequently Honorary Secretary of Foster's English Madrigal Choir, and her brother Benjamin one of the singers c1930 (*Letters, vide supra*, page 4).
- [176] Following some ground-breaking Radio Three broadcasts under Martyn Brabbins's conductorship, a CD entirely devoted to Coles's music has been issued by Hyperion (*Music from behind the lines*, CDA 67293), and a more detailed biographical sketch than mine contributed to the accompanying notes by John Purser. The words I attributed to Holst ('a genius before anything else...') were, in fact, attributed by Holst to Coles's 'great "chum" in the Battalion' and were carved on his gravestone at Clouy. The predominant influence at this stage of his career — the only stage he was allowed — was, as with Holst at the same age, Wagner; his impressive command of orchestral writing was full of promise.
- [177] Palmer's importance in the formation of the Morley College Folk Dance Club is duly acknowledged in Chapter 2 of *The Dancing Years* by Hazel James and Sally Phillips (published by the Club, 2002).
- [178] Gandy, along with J Dean Grimson and W J Mitson, 'contributed many admirable notes' to the programmes of the South Place Sunday Popular Concerts (W S Beardmore: *The Story of a Thousand Concerts*,

published by South Place Ethical Society, 1927). He gave one of his pictures to Holst and another, or perhaps decorated Royal Doulton Ware, to Archibald T Davison of Harvard (cf Holst's letter to him from the New Lodge Clinic, January 1934, Holst Foundation).

[181] Letters and articles in the national press and mention on the BBC's Radio Three *In Tune* programme have demonstrated the general concern at the plight of the Holst Birthplace Museum, following the lamentable withdrawal of financial support by the local council.

[185] The Albany CD of Goldstone and Clemmow has been re-released on Olympia OCD 683.

[186] The publication of *Ratri* with Raymond Head's article in *TEMPO* is not in facsimile.



Holst's birthplace, Cheltenham  
Drawing by Aylwin Sampson, reproduced by courtesy of the Holst Birthplace Museum



W Vincent Wallace [undated photograph]  
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