



## Chairman's Message

**Issue 56**

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The past three months has seen a lot of work around maintaining and improving the **fabric of the Museum**. The walls in the entrance hall and on the stairs to the first floor landing have been repainted to repair damage caused when furniture was removed in preparation for last year's flood damage reparation work. The walls in the old Butler's Pantry and Wine Store have similarly been repainted and wooden stair rods installed on the flight leading from the basement to the ground floor. As planned, the internal drainage in the loft has been improved to reduce the likelihood of further rainwater damage. Work on the external pipework and to repair cracked rendering in the rear courtyard is awaiting listed building approval. We have also made applications to secure funding to repair several windows and improve draught-proofing, repaint the façade, front door and railings, redecorate the front and rear Music Room and improve external signage.

The visitor experience at the Museum will be improved by new **text panels** - the first of which are now in place - and new floor and wall stands to display information about the various rooms.

As can be seen, much is being done to maintain and enhance the look of the Museum and to make it a welcoming and enjoyable place to visit. Our customer feedback is overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. Our challenge remains to get more people to visit the Museum. The Trustees have spent some time looking at this issue, and at how to improve our finances generally. One factor is the realization that potential visitors with no specific interest in Holst and music can be attracted by the house and its Victorian presentation and exhibits. We are thus keen to generate more visitors interested in these architectural, social and local history aspects.

As a part of this initiative we are considering changing the name of the Museum: one possibility is '**Holst's Victorian House**'. This would reflect the point that much of the Museum is dedicated to presenting the house as it was when Holst lived in it. I should stress that we have no intention of reducing the space and exhibits dedicated to Holst, his music and his family. Our aim is to retain those visitors attracted by the Holst connection whilst broadening the potential visitor base. The Trustees would like to hear the views of Friends and Volunteers about this potential change. Any alternative proposals would also be of interest. Please send your views and comments to [stevewood12@btinternet.com](mailto:stevewood12@btinternet.com) or mail them to me at the Museum.

We are delighted to welcome new Volunteers Zanda Berke, Jessica Davies, Philip Dawes and John & Mandy Rowlands. As mentioned in the last Newsletter we still need to recruit more Volunteers to enable us to keep the Museum open as advertised. As part of our recruitment efforts we will have a **Volunteer Information Day** on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June, tying in with the national Volunteers' Week. We hope to raise significant interest.

Before the next Newsletter is published the **Gustav's Gramophone exhibition** that Laura has designed will have been launched. This is based on the Holst family gramophone that was donated to the Museum in 2015. We intended to stage the exhibition last year but that plan had to be abandoned due to the closure following the rainwater damage. We are grateful for the generosity of three sponsors who have supported the exhibition, which will run from the beginning of July to December.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Chairman's Message continued

(Continued from page 1)

Our **AGM** will be held at St. Matthew's Church Hall in Clarence Street on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July at 2.30pm. I would encourage all Friends and Volunteers to attend. Following the formal business of the meeting I am delighted that we will be having a talk by **James Grasby** of the National Trust, who will be telling us about their work and plans at the Elgar Birthplace Museum following their taking a lease on the property in December 2016. I look forward to seeing you there.

Steve Wood

## Gustav's Gramophone

Most people think of the Museum, the childhood home of Gustav Holst up to the age of seven, as primarily Victorian. However, actually much of our collection dates from the 1920s and 1930s when Holst was in the later stages of his adulthood. In keeping with this later period, one of our most recent and indeed more significant acquisitions is a **Columbia Grafonola gramophone** dating from 1926, which belonged to the Holst family before eventually being acquired by the Museum in 2015.

This summer the gramophone will transport visitors back to the gramophone age as part of our *Gustav's Gramophone* exhibition. Excitingly visitors will not just see the gramophone, they will also hear it. A recording will be made of the gramophone playing Holst's very own *The Planets* which visitors will be able to access as part of the display. As well as the gramophone visitors will also be able to view **rare shellac discs** on loan from The Collection of Neil Arthur Williams. They will also be able to see gramophone memorabilia on loan from The Wilson Art Gallery & Museum.

There will be a variety of activities and events throughout the summer as part of the exhibition. They range from curator talks to hunting knitted **HMV 'Nipper' dogs** around the Museum! There will also be the opportunity to try out the Museum's new Learning Space in the former Butler's Pantry. Here families can have a go at one of our 'colour-in and cut-out' gramophone-themed activities, as well as dressing up and handling replica objects.

To start off the gramophone celebrations there will be a grand opening day on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1.30-5pm. This will include baking on the Victorian range – with a twist! Everything for visitors to sample will be cooked from a 1920s edition of Mrs Beeton. For Museum Friends and supporters of the exhibition there will also be a brief talk in the morning by musicologist **Neil Arthur Williams**, focusing on Holst's early recordings. This promises to be a rare opportunity to gain new insights into these shellac recordings, as well as offering fresh listening perspectives on early recording technology and related performance issues of early classical recordings generally.

As always, the exhibition and its associated events could not take place if it wasn't for the generous support of our sponsors. We would like to thank **John Baker, Elan Homes** and **Toni&Guy** the hairdressers for making our vintage summer possible. See you there (1920s dress optional)!

Laura Kinnear

## 'Lakeside Matinee'

On Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May several of the Friends enjoyed a fundraising concert - kindly offered to us by cellist **David Powell** - at Lake House, the home of Princess **Nina Odescalchi**. David was joined by pianist **Paul Guinery** and they gave us an afternoon of stunning music by Handel, Beethoven, Schumann, Delius and Chopin. They also included two rarely-performed works by Gustav and Imogen Holst: respectively *Invocation* and *The Fall of the Leaf*. 63 people attended this lovely concert and we are most appreciative of the generosity of David, Paul & Nina in making the event possible.

Sue Walker

## Amelia von Holst

Ever since I heard the story about Amelia von Holst, wife of artist Theodor, keeping a **stiletto** in her bodice to attack her husband, I have been intrigued. She certainly sounds a match for Theodor who indulged in alcohol and drugs during his 34 years and presumably wasn't the easiest man to live with. Two self portraits show him with a smoking pipe and there are references in his work to opium, the 19<sup>th</sup> century narcotic of choice. This less than healthy lifestyle presumably hastened his end.

Amelia was not exactly blameless if we are to believe William Bell Scott, a friend of both Theodor and Dante Gabriel Rossetti: "Holst fell in love, to use an old-fashioned phrase for a perennial disease, with a wild creature who led him into ruinous courses". He goes on to call her "a loudly dressed woman who wanted not the power of fascination nor the ability to use it", and suggests that it was her "unconquerable jealousy" which led her "to keep a stiletto secreted in the sacred hollow of her bodice for his benefit". Fortunately he died before Amelia had chance to use it, but what became of her?

Recent research by HBT Friend **Peter Holst** has uncovered some of her story. She was born Amelia Symmes Villars c.1822 in Middlesex. Her father, Thomas Symmes Villars, was born c.1779 and died in 1847. This is the only family member we can currently trace. On the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1841 Amelia married **Theodor Richard Edward von Holst**, son of Mathias von Holst, at All Souls Church, Langham Place. Her father Thomas was one of the witnesses at the wedding. There is no record of where the couple met or how long they had known each other. Sadly, after less than 3 years of marriage Theodor died on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 1844 leaving Amelia a young widow. Theodor was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1844 in the same grave as his father Mathias.

We know that Amelia was involved in the posthumous sale of Theodor's paintings, although there is nothing further to report until the 1851 census: aged 29 she is listed as an annuitant, probably living off a combination of her father's and Theodor's estates, and residing at 3 Buckingham St, London. A few years later she left for New Zealand, where in 1857 she marries a **Lyndon Howard Dobie**. They eventually set up home in Australia: the Sands Directory shows Lyndon living in Mullens St, Balmain, New South Wales 1867-1877. Interestingly in March 1882 the New South Wales passenger lists show Mr L.H. Dobie aged 46 on the ship *Rodney* bound for London, presumably with wife Amelia to set up home in England. We know she returned to London because in June 1885, aged 63, she died there. Her second husband outlived her until 1914, remarkably different to the 1840s when Theodor died.

Clearly there is much more to learn about Amelia and many questions remain. Some of the things I would like to know include: did she ever sit for her artist husband? Did she keep any of his paintings or sketches? And did she really hide a stiletto in her bodice?

Laura Kinnear

## Sir Peter Marychurch

We note with sadness the passing of Sir Peter Marychurch, a longstanding and loyal supporter of the Museum. Sir Peter and wife June joined the Friends close to the inauguration of the Trust. Their active interest, often visiting and attending events with their great friend Dame Patricia Routledge, was greatly valued. He will also be remembered for his roles in Cheltenham arts, including Chairman of the Music Festival, Chairman of Cheltenham Festivals and President of the Cheltenham Arts Council.

Sue Adlard

## Festival Diary Date

In addition to the events on page 4, you may wish to note the following date in your diary. As part of the Cheltenham Music Festival there will be a performance of *The Hymn of Jesus* on **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July at 7.00pm** in Gloucester Cathedral. This is the centenary year of the work's composition and it will be paired with Vaughan Williams' **A Sea Symphony**. Martyn Brabbins conducts the Salomon Orchestra and the 150-strong chorus comprises singers from all over Gloucestershire and from the Huddersfield Choral Society. See [cheltenhamfestivals.com/music](http://cheltenhamfestivals.com/music) for more details.

Editor

# Events

**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June 9.30am:** Guided Walk along the Holst Way

Inspired by Laura and Sara's epic walk last summer in aid of 'Help Holst' we will be having another, much shorter, but nonetheless interesting and enjoyable walk, to be led by Keith Woodman. We will be walking from Cleeve Hill to Belas Knapp and return, starting from the Cleeve Hill Golf Club where lunch will be available after the walk for those who want it.

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August:** Car Boot Sale

Last year's sale was both enjoyable and lucrative, so we will be doing it all over again. Please hang on to those unwanted items for us!

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 7.00pm at All Saints' Church:** The Birthday Concert - The Holst Singers

The musical content of the concert is being finalised by the Holst Singers and will include Holst's *Six Folksongs* for mixed voices, the third group of *Choral Hymns* from the *Rig Veda*, and Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G Minor*. Further details of the concert will be provided over the next few weeks.

## Further Events

A poster listing all our remaining 2017 events can be found in the Volunteers' Room in the Museum, and the information will also shortly be available on the website. The Events Committee is now working on events for 2018 and 2019! Any suggestions are welcome.

Sue Walker

# Membership of the Friends

The Friends of the Holst were sorry to hear of the death of Life member **Mary Ralphs**. We are pleased to welcome a returned member **Michael Ewer** from Texas.

We are grateful to those members who topped up their subscriptions once it was realised they had paid at the old rate. If you pay by Standing Order, do double check before 1 October to ensure your bank remits to us the correct amount as detailed below.

If you are not already a subscribing Friend of the Trust, please do consider joining and also tell your friends. Not only would you have the satisfaction of giving financial and general support to the Museum, but you would enjoy many other benefits. The Museum leaflet contains an application form.

Annual Membership rates are:

Single £20, Joint/Family £30, Young £5, Single Benefactor £60, Joint/Family Benefactor £100, Single Life £300, Joint Life £400, Gift Membership £20.

For further details email [membership@holstmuseum.org.uk](mailto:membership@holstmuseum.org.uk) or contact Tom Clarke on 01242 227720.

If you would like to become a **Volunteer** at the Museum, and thus a Volunteer Friend, please contact Jenny Fortescue on 01242 514627.

We would like to be able to deliver this newsletter exclusively by email where possible, which would save us both postage costs and effort. If **any readers** (whether already on our mailing list or not) would like to take up this option, please email [membership@holstmuseum.org.uk](mailto:membership@holstmuseum.org.uk).

Tom Clarke



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