



## Chairman's Message

**Issue 67**

**February 2020**

### Inside this issue:

Chairman's Message	2
German Engineering ..	2
Volunteer News	2
A Hurdy-Gurdy Man	3
The New Season	3
Future Events	4
Membership	4

As in every year, it is great to see the Museum open again and welcoming visitors following the winter closure. Along with some other Trustees and Volunteers, I spent time in the Museum during the opening week asking visitors to complete a short questionnaire about their experience during the visit. It was heartening to find that not only was every visitor I spoke to happy to complete the questionnaire, but also their experience had been overwhelmingly positive and enjoyable.

The questionnaires are being completed both to inform our thinking about future plans and to provide input for the '*Users and Their Experiences*' section of our application for **museum re-accreditation**. Work on re-accreditation will form a major part of our activity for the coming year. Our return will need to be submitted in April 2021, but we are looking to complete the majority of the work by the turn of the year.

Apart from the 'User' section, which will also require data on non-users, we need to complete sections on '*Organisational Health*' and '*Managing Collections*', both of which have several sub-elements. For example we will need to ensure that all of our policy and procedural documentation is up to date and that we have a detailed Forward Plan.

The other item that will take up resources is the **re-branding** of the Museum to encourage visitors interested in a period house and in experiencing life when Holst lived at 4 Clarence Road, or 4 Pittville Terrace as it then was. More on this can be found in Alan Gilmour's article. However, I would just reiterate Alan's point that we are not seeking to downplay the Holst elements of our offering, but hope to broaden our appeal by setting Holst in the context of his home. I trust that this will become apparent as our plans develop.

I would like to mention that our (now annual) event '**The Planets Circle Dinner**' will take place this year on the evening of Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June at the New Club in Montpellier Parade. As last year the evening will include a glass of Prosecco on arrival, a three-course dinner, coffee and petit fours followed by a short talk; all for the price of £45 a head. This includes a £10 donation to Museum funds.

This year our after-dinner speaker will be **Stephanie Williams**. Among other distinguished roles in the world of classical music, Stephanie has been Director of the P&O Cruises '*Music Festivals at Sea*' since 1984, and from 1990 to 2003 was the UK Artistic Director of the William Walton Trust. In this role in 2002 she masterminded the centenary celebrations of his birth. **William Walton** will be the subject with which she will entertain us. I will be circulating full details shortly, but if you would like to book a place or places at this stage do email me at [stevewood12@btinternet.com](mailto:stevewood12@btinternet.com).

We were greatly saddened to learn that **Douglas Ogle** had passed away on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019. We extend our condolences to Jenny and the Ogle family on their sad loss. Alongside Jenny, Douglas made a lasting contribution to the artistic life and heritage of Cheltenham and was a generous and committed supporter of the Museum.

*(continued on page 2)*

## Chairman's Message continued

As this is the first edition of the Newsletter for 2020, we look forward to a busy and, hopefully, successful year: we have much to do. Thank you for your continuing support.

Steve Wood

## German Engineering and Gustav Holst

BMW, Coke, Ryanair: what do these have in common? They are all brands. They all stand for something. They are all relevant to and resonate with the audience they are seeking to attract. Reading the feedback we receive, the Holst Birthplace Museum also ticks these boxes.

But our challenge as a Museum, indeed our survival, is dependent on us widening our appeal beyond our core audience. For our research shows that not enough people are aware of Holst or even interested in a late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century composer who wrote some of our finest classical musical. And if we are not thought relevant, we will not get considered in a very crowded market for today's leisure pound, and we will not get people in through the doors.

So we have decided that we need to widen our appeal, to be relevant to more people, to stand for something new, different and hopefully more appealing. We know that our Victorian-themed events do have appeal and this is a great starting point: to use the Victorian heritage of the house as our core proposition to re-position ourselves as '**The Holst Victorian House: a house where history was made**'. This is a proposition that will widen our appeal, generate interest and re-appraisal, and allow us to talk about Holst within this context.

To support this we have a **new logo** and a **new look** for our material. But we need more. We are re-branding not re-badging. Strong brands deliver an experience consistently, and we must review our own experience. The House is a theatre, and all great theatres require a cast - our Volunteers and all who work there - a script, and a stage. For us to produce great theatre we need to think how to use our stage differently: to identify some signature actions that will communicate we are changing, and that we are different.

We have some great ideas for this, some easy, some less so, many suggested by our Volunteers. And as Trustees we are currently evaluating the feasibility of these. This will determine when we launch our new look and name. So watch this space!

But be assured: Holst is not being airbrushed. He will continue to be present, albeit in a broader and, hopefully, more interesting and relevant context.

We have a great story to tell. And we are committed fully to telling it to today's and future generations.

Alan Gilmour

## Volunteer News

We are delighted to welcome back **Charlotte Tarrant**. Charlotte first volunteered at the Museum for a week's work experience when she was 16. She made a much-loved doll which can still be found in the Nursery. 6 years on she graduated with a degree in costume design and is back with us running a Children's Sewing Club and helping with this year's Community Pride project, *Holst on The Move*.

Lucy Moriarty

*Correction: Please note the correct spelling of Judith Syvret's surname, which was wrongly listed in the last Newsletter. Our apologies to Judith.*

## A Hurdy-Gurdy Man

In the 1870s Holst listened to a hurdy-gurdy man perform in Cheltenham town centre. According to Holst's biographer Michael Short "[The] instrument could only play one tune, and each time he heard it there were fewer notes than before, so that eventually the melody was barely recognizable." Later in life Holst incorporated the tune, a Northumberland folk song, into his piece, *Toccata for piano*.

Twenty or so years before Holst watched the hurdy-gurdy man, the journalist **Henry Mayhew** compiled the seminal *London Living and London Poor*. This three-volume tome paints a colourful picture of what could be discovered on 19<sup>th</sup> century streets. In his section on street musicians he writes, "they [the performers] are of multifarious classes. As a general rule, they may almost be divided into the tolerable and the intolerable performers, some of them trusting to their skill in music for their reward for their exertions, others only making a *noise*, so that whatever money they obtain is given them merely as an inducement to depart."

Nevertheless one of the musicians Mayhew cites as having a degree of talent is the hurdy-gurdy player, '**Old Sarah**'. Interestingly this woman learned music in the workhouse as a means of earning 'bread'. Mayhew also describes a French hurdy-gurdy man who tells him that only educated people appreciate his music: "I play before a public-house, or before a cottage, and they say, "That's all very well", but they do not know that to make a hurdy-gurdy sound like a violin requires great art and patience." This man goes on to say that he is only able to make money by having his children dance on the streets while he plays. He also adds that he performs outside windows of 'good houses' in order to extract cash. This comment is a reminder of how street performers would play in residential streets, not just in the centre of towns.

In fact Holst himself experienced this very thing when a group of Border Morris, their faces blackened, danced outside the windows of 4 Pittville Terrace. Holst was so frightened by their appearance that he remembered the incident for the rest of his life. As Mayhew's account of London highlights, the hurdy-gurdy man and the Morris troupe were unlikely to be the only musicians Holst encountered in Cheltenham. It is reasonable to suppose that as the young Holst wandered the streets his ears were filled with different strains of music, his mind absorbing the sights and sounds, subconsciously saving notes for the future.

Indeed, when we consider the breadth of instruments on the street listed by Mayhew: "Scotch Violoncello Player, Scotch Piper and Dancing Girl, Poor Harp Player, Organ Man, with Flute Harmonicon Organ" as well as "The English Street Bands" and "The German Street Bands", our contemporary streets seem rather dull and devoid of spectacle as well as sound. Certainly we are used to musicians playing in designated spaces, but the frequency and surprise which some of the Victorian musicians must have engendered is perhaps something to mourn!

Laura Kinnear

## The New Season

Despite the rain, our first week of 2020 got off to a great start. Tuesday in particular was a busy day as families joined Judith, Penny and Paul to make toadstool nightlights in the Victorian Kitchen, and followed the ever popular mouse trail around the house. Writing on Twitter a visitor thanked us for "a really fun, interactive and educational half-term morning." Our new till system proved its worth as visitors can now make donations for drop-in craft activities by card.

Trustees and Volunteers were also able to collect lots of valuable, mostly positive, user feedback which we will need when we come to renew our accreditation next year. Later on we welcomed a group visit from **The William Morris Society** who were particularly impressed with the block printed wallpaper in the Regency Room. We rounded off the week with the inaugural Sewing Club for children aged 8 and over. Guests gathered by the fire in the Victorian Kitchen as Charlotte taught them how to embroider cross stitch bookmarks.

Lucy Moriarty

## Future Events

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March, 6.30pm at Southam Village Hall:** Indian Music and Dance

The Nethra Academy of Performing Arts will be presenting a programme of Indian music and dance. We plan to have a short introduction about Holst's Indian-influenced music and his interest in Hindu culture.

**Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April, 7.30pm at St Luke's Hall:** 'Cheltenham: A Secret A-Z'

Eminent local author and historian David Elder will give a talk revealing less well-known and remarkable facts about Cheltenham.

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May, at Chapel Arts:** Concert by renowned local 8-voice chamber choir Octavo.

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> September, at St Andrew's Church:** Birthday Concert with the Oriel Singers.

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> October, at Pittville School:** 'Pittville After Pitt, 1842-90'. A talk by Dr Steven Blake.

**Friday 27<sup>th</sup> November, at The Beehive in Montpellier:** Promises Auction

Alan Parker

*Editor's Note: On **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June** Morley College and others are holding a centenary celebration of Holst's **1920 Whitsun Festival** in Dulwich. The venue - as in 1920 - will be the chapel next door to Dulwich Picture Gallery.*

## Membership of the Friends

We are delighted to report that the **Cheltenham Trust** will give Friends a **10% discount** at all Trust eateries - the cafe at The Wilson, at the Leisure Centre, and the pop-up cafe at Pittville Pump Room. Simply show your membership card. We are now extending a £1 discount to Friends of The Wilson.

We also have a reciprocal arrangement with the **Holst Society** ([www.holstsociety.org](http://www.holstsociety.org)), whereby Friends of the HBT are entitled to a 40% discount on membership of the Society.

If you are not already a subscribing Friend of the Trust, please do consider joining and also tell your friends. Not only will you have the satisfaction of giving financial and general support to the Museum, but you will also 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 please contact me at [membership@holstmuseum.org.uk](mailto:membership@holstmuseum.org.uk) or 01242 227720.

If you would like to become a **Volunteer** at the Museum, and thus a Volunteer Friend, please contact Lucy Moriarty at [volunteers@holstmuseum.org.uk](mailto:volunteers@holstmuseum.org.uk) or 01242 524846.

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



4 Clarence Road  
Cheltenham  
GL52 2AY

Curator: Laura Kinnear  
email: [curator@holstmuseum.org.uk](mailto:curator@holstmuseum.org.uk)

Learning & Admin Coord: Lucy Moriarty  
email: [learning@holstmuseum.org.uk](mailto:learning@holstmuseum.org.uk)

Newsletter editor: Mike Jenkinson  
email: [newsletter@holstmuseum.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@holstmuseum.org.uk)

Website: [www.holstmuseum.org.uk](http://www.holstmuseum.org.uk)

Registered Charity No. 1078599

The Trustees are most grateful to the following:

**President:**

Martyn Brabbins

**Patrons:**

Lord Berkeley of Knighton CBE  
Clive Carroll  
Dame Felicity Lott DBE  
Lily Neill  
Adrian Partington  
Dame Patricia Routledge DBE  
Jeff Wayne

**Supporters:**

Cheltenham Borough Council  
Willans LLP