

## PETER WARLOCK SOCIETY

President: Sir William Walton

Vice-Presidents: Malcolm Arnold, Richard Rodney Bennett, Sir Lennox Berkeley, Lord Harewood, Sir Peter Pears

# Peter Warlock Society

# NEWSLETTER

Newsletter No. 23 January 1979

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### SUBSCRIPTION SCHEME: NEXT ISSUES

We offer humble apologies for the non-appearance of the second and third items in the subscription scheme launched last year. Everyone who showed interest should have had the first item (the piano-duet transcription by Fred Tomlinson of the *Serenade for Delius*), and by now the second and third items should have been with you. We'll not bore you with explanations but merely say that both Fred's book on *Warlock and Van Dieren* and the special edition of the *Five Folk-Song Preludes* will be with you by the end of February, if not before.

### WELCOME FOR NEW LP

The latest all-Warlock record to appear — it was taken from a BBC series of programmes broadcast in 1977 — has had an enthusiastic press. Some of the reviews are reproduced elsewhere in this newsletter, so we need say no more except that we are sure every member will find its purchase well worth while.

The attractive sleeve drawing, showing Warlock at various periods of his life, is based on some photos we supplied to Decca. The sleeve doesn't make the point clear — pity. But it's a fine production otherwise.

### 50TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT

We have for some time been trying to get a date at the Purcell Room to present another Warlock concert. We've now been offered a booking in February 1980, but the committee have asked the hall if we could have a booking as near as possible in December 1980 to the 50th anniversary of Warlock's death. We hope to announce full details in the next newsletter, along with other activities to mark the anniversary.

### THE SAGA CONTINUES . . .

Whence Ian Copley's book on Warlock? you may ask. The sudden death of publisher Dennis Dobson three months ago was the final ironic twist to this most incredible of stories of delay upon delay and procrastination upon procrastination. All that can be said is that Mrs Dobson seems to be making valiant efforts to hold the firm together, and Ian's book looks set for spring publication . . . .

### WARLOCK AT WESTMINSTER

Committee member Anthony Ingle is one of the organisers of an enterprising concert, mainly of British 20th-century music, at Westminster Cathedral hall on February 17 at 7.30. Ian Honeyman will be tenor soloist in *The Curlew*, also in Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge*. The other artists include the Guadagnini string quartet, the Locrian wind quintet, and Anthony himself as pianist.

### 'HASSAN' RECORDING

Mention was made in the last newsletter of the recently published book *Flecker and Delius — the making of 'Hassan'* by Dawn Redwood. Included in this is an account of Warlock's contribution to the musical side of this epoch-making production. We understand the complete music score has just been published by Boosey and Hawkes and it has also been recorded by EMI.

### LYRITA LP ON THE WAY

Lyrta have recordings 'in the can' of *Capriol Suite* (in the full orchestral version — the first time this has been recorded), *An Old Song* (also a first recording) and the *Serenade for Delius's 60th Birthday*. However, because of a huge pile-up of recordings at Lyrta the record won't be issued until 1980.

## BOOKLET IN PREPARATION

A half-hour talk on Warlock by Fred Tomlinson, written and recorded about two years ago, was eventually put out on Radio 3 last October. The talk was followed by a 35-minute programme of Warlock on records.

Fred's script will form the basis of a booklet being prepared for publication by the Society sometime in 1979. This should, among other uses, meet the needs of the people (often schoolchildren doing 'O' or 'A' level music projects) who write to ask for general material on Warlock.

## BRITISH MUSIC SOCIETY

A British Music Society has been formed with some ambitious names and an impressive list of officers. Sir Lennox Berkeley – one of our vice-presidents – is president, and vice-presidents are Sir Adrian Boult, Lady Bliss, Dame Janet Baker, Edmund Rubbra, Sir Alexander Gibson and Malcolm Williamson. Their second newsletter is due to appear in the spring and will, we understand, include mention of the Peter Warlock Society.

Full details from the membership secretary, Ian Bourn, at 65 Royal Oak Road, Bexleyheath, Kent.

Projects in progress include:

- The preparation of a comprehensive booklet containing profiles of all significant British composers in the period 1800 to the present day; this will provide a handy guide for all British music enthusiasts.
- The preparation of the annual Journal, with high quality features and articles on all aspects of British music.
- The establishing of regional branches in the UK and associated organisations abroad, and to work in conjunction with existing bodies such as 'The Society for British Music, Inc.' in the USA.
- The setting up of a major archive of discs, tapes, scores, letters, and personal reminiscences of British musicians of past generations.
- A wide variety of recording and publishing ventures, some in collaboration with other music promotion organisations.

## BRAILLE WARLOCK?

A most interesting letter from one of our new members, a Canadian who is totally blind, mentions that quite a number of Warlock songs are available in Braille through the RNIB. We must, as they say, check that out.

## HANDBOOK VOLUME 3

Completion of Volume 3 of Fred Tomlinson's *A Peter Warlock Handbook* has been held up by heavy demands on Fred's time (not least his appearances in the Two Ronnies shows on BBC TV). However, there is some chance the book will appear in 1979, and thus complete a notable trilogy.

## PHOTO LIST EXTENDED

We've now revised and extended the library of photos of Warlock and his associates that has been built up steadily over the last few years. The full list is available on application. Any member wanting prints should contact the editor, who will be able to quote a price before the job is put in hand.

## RUSSIAN 'CAPRIOL'

The BBC Symphony Orchestra's new conductor, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, and his pianist wife Victoria Postnikova gave a piano-duet recital at St John's, Smith Square, recently. Their all-English second half included the *Capriol Suite*.

## NOT 'ANON' . . .

The recently published *New Oxford Book of Light Verse*, chosen and edited by Kingsley Amis, includes Heseltine's limerick 'Young girls who frequent picture palaces . . .' but attributes it to Anon. Reviewing the book in the *Daily Telegraph*, Anthony Powell puts the record right.

## YORKSHIRE RELISH

The *Yorkshire Post's* music critic Ernest Bradbury is a keen Warlock-lover and has several times written about him in his 'Music and Musicians' column. The most recent occasion was an article 'Sounds of willow, fox and Warlock', reproduced elsewhere in this issue.

## GRAINGER ENTHUSIAST

We notice that among those active in the newly-formed Percy Grainger Society is Gerald Cockshott, a former chairman of the PW Society. The Grainger Society's latest magazine is a most absorbing publication of over 40 pages.

## COMPETITION (See Newsletter No 21)

A disappointing response has led to only one item being identified so far. The 4-part lute song is 'Down a down: thus Phyllis sung' from Thomas Pilkington's 1605 book. A prize is going to PC Edwards of Bedford.

## PS . . .

The AGM will be held on May 12 in Kent, near Eynsford – details to follow . . . secretary Malcolm Rudland's address now is 12 Pembroke Road, London W8 6NT.

## LETTER FROM DAVID COX

In his sleeve-note for the recent Norman Bailey record of Warlock songs, Fred Tomlinson states: 'Towards the end of that year (1930) he took his own life'.

Not very long ago, in the pages of this Newsletter, there was some lively correspondence on this subject: was Warlock's death an accident or suicide? Some members of the Society felt that the seemingly cowardly escape of suicide was not in character, and therefore must be a wrong interpretation of the facts. As far as I know, this discussion has never been finally resolved.

Normally, we accept that a signed sleeve-note may contain the personal views of the author. But when to the signature is added the designation 'Chairman, Peter Warlock Society' the reader may well receive the impression that the statement about Warlock's death represents the 'official' view of the Society. Does it? Yours etc.

David Cox

## REPLY FROM FRED TOMLINSON

Long-standing members (I am not referring to the limerick above!) with long-serving memories will recall various items in earlier Newsletters giving the pros and cons of the suicide/accident controversy. Our founder, C P Mills, sparked it off with his article 'It all began with the limericks' in Newsletter No 7, dated June 1971.

The following issue contained a protest from Bernard J van Dieren describing the suicide theory as a 'canard'.

Newsletters 9 and 10, besides more comments from Patrick Mills, contained letters from David Cox, Ian Parrott and Gerald Cockshott giving their views but stressing that the truth remained uncertain.

At that time I felt I had nothing to add. I, too, deplored Cecil Gray's method of stating opinions as if they were facts and when writing about PH's death used phrases like 'perhaps by his own hand'.

It was only while researching and writing my book *Warlock and van Dieren* (to be published in February) that my views clarified and I became more and more certain that suicide was the only answer. At the same time I was writing the sleeve notes for the Norman Bailey record (DSLO 19), and I must apologise for stating so uncompromisingly 'he took his own life', particularly as the following subscription gave the appearance of an official view.

When I wrote the notes for DSLO 27 I was more moderate ('almost certainly self-inflicted') but at the time I wrote the earlier remarks I was in the throes of the BvD saga.

In the BvD book I examined the question carefully and quoted from hitherto unpublished sources. Delays in its appearance (BvD books seem to be particularly accident-prone) have led to the opinion appearing without the reasoning behind it.

We may never know the facts, and no doubt the arguments will go on. There is no doubt that in 1930 views on suicide were very different from these held now. Relatives were most anxious to avoid the stigma and 'the gentry' were better able to sway a coroner's decision towards 'the sensible thing'.

I think we can ignore the verdict at the inquest. The evidence (apart from gas technicians and, for some unaccountable reason, John Ireland, who hardly knew PH) came from three people with vested interests — PH's mother, who kept a tight hand on the purse-strings and yet could not understand how PH could come to have financial problems; BvD, who had been living off his scroungings from PH and others for several years and now stood to gain more than he had ever earned himself; and PH's mistress ('Mrs Warlock'), who after a 'tiny and unimportant' quarrel spent the fatal night in an hotel.

My opinion, which I feel I can voice in a Newsletter if not in a more definitive work, is that PH was literally 'sick to death' of a number of things. Bruce Blunt wrote of 'a combination of tendencies, events and atmosphere all meeting at zero hour' and this to me is the key. Individually each item may not seem sufficient reason for such a drastic step, but consider the cumulative effect, added to his well-known depression at that time of year. (Was this mood brought on by memories of early Christmasses with his sanctimonious Uncle Evelyn, who had died a few months earlier leaving over half a million pounds but ignoring PH in his will?)

The market for songs — his only really successful output — appeared to have dried up. Was this due to PH having exhausted his goodwill flogging BvD compositions to OUP and Curwen for far more than they could hope to recoup in sales?

He had quarrelled with his girl-friend. However serious this was, she was certainly spending the night elsewhere.

His mentor BvD arrived that evening. No one knows what their conversation was about, but judging by existing correspondence it seems a safe bet that money came into it. PH was hopeless about money, and although fed up with BvD's importunities his regard for the older composer was never affected.

PH was broke as usual, without even a bottle of beer in the flat. His only source of extra money was his mother, who many years previously had formed a strong antagonism towards BvD. Was the final straw realisation by PH that suicide, far from being a negative act, was a positive way of helping BvD and annoying his mother?

This is conjecture. Let me quote Winifred Baker for a final word:

'I can feel almost gladness now that it is over — that he has at last found the peace and quietude he so loved and never — or seldom — could find in the world'.



## MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

# Sounds of willow, fox and Warlock

A RADIO programme that preceded the beginning of the Test match last Thursday, reminded me of a story, or rather two stories, that I have been meaning to relate for some time.

The programme, narrated by John Arlott, was called "The Sound of Cricket," and was made up of "music, verse and comment on the summer game."

I had switched on expecting to hear, in Mr. Arlott's compilation, a selection or two from the magical writings of Neville Cardus. In that I was disappointed. But as compensation there was a performance, as delightful as it was unexpected, and replete with male chorus, of Peter Warlock's rumbustious "The Cricketers of Hambledon."

Now it should be explained that some aesthetes of my acquaintance, who of course do not like cricket anyway, were dismayed beyond measure that Warlock published this song. Some went so far as to say that Warlock's late-developed interest in the game, in those stormy and turbulent last years which eventually cost him his life, was prompted solely by the fact that on cricket grounds one can drink beer all day.

As to that, I am in no position to comment. But the words of this cricketing song were written by Bruce Blunt, a journalist and poet who supplied several texts for Warlock in the last few years of Warlock's life, but a personality somewhat written off, by Warlock's biographer, Cecil Gray, among "the vast horde of superficial acquaintances and boon companions" with whom he began to associate.

Gray, an aesthete if ever there was one, seemed especially pained by this apparent fall from grace. "When he began writing such songs as 'The Cricketers of Hambledon' and became a member of the Royal and Ancient Order of Frothblowers even I felt that he was carrying an excellent joke too far..."

Nevertheless, one of Warlock's greatest songs is "The Fox," to words by Bruce Blunt. And here is my first story. Years after Warlock was dead, I met Blunt in Fleet Street, and later at the Antelope in Sloane Square, in company with Augustus John, Dylan Thomas, and several other celebrities who then haunted that part of London. We talked about "The Fox," and the story that follows is Blunt's.

They had been drinking at The Fox inn at Bramdean, a little village in Hampshire, where Warlock was staying with Blunt at Marriner's Farm nearby, Philip (i.e., Warlock) went to bed; but Blunt ("rather foolishly, after all that beer") opened a bottle of Chablis, sat up and wrote the poem about the fox's head on the wall of the pub; a sardonic, realistic piece, which ends: "I shall not move, you will not stir. When the fangs fall from that brown fur."

He left the poem on the table, pinning to it a note to the effect that it might not be much use for setting to music. Next morning, rising late, Warlock, fresh as the proverbial daisy, greeted him with the words: "On the contrary, my dear sir; an excellent poem for music." It was already fully sketched out. That afternoon, they had to go to Salisbury, Warlock hired a music studio with a piano for an hour, and completed the song.

"I do not know," mused Blunt after telling this story, "whether or not it is a record. But anyway, there you are. Words and music were conceived, composed and completed in less than 24 hours."

## Morbid beauty

Gray writes: "In the unearthliness and other worldliness of 'The Frostbound Wood' (words also by Blunt) in the obsession with the idea of death and dissolution in 'The Fox,' there is a strange, morbid beauty quite different from anything else in his work, or in any other music that I know. For that matter, and only paralleled in any art by the poetry of Thomas Lovell Beddoes."

Now to my second story. A year or two ago, motoring my strange way from Sussex to the West Country, along roads unfamiliar to me, I suddenly, to my intense surprise, found myself entering the village of Bramdean. And there, on the main road, and open ready to serve snack lunches, was The Fox; altered, no doubt, from its appearance in 1930, but most certainly the same inn.

I entered in a somewhat excited frame of mind, ready to ask many questions. It was hardly necessary. In spite of the open bar, the obvious modernisation of the interior structure, there was that same fox's head, still "laughing at us all," with its "death's date" in "faded gold." But underneath, behind glass, was a spread-out copy of the song, words and some of the music, with a brief account of the tale I have just told, placed there by the Warlock Society.

The chairman of that Society, Fred Tomlinson, briefly refers to it on the sleeve of Norman Bailey's recording of Warlock's Songs issued last year by L'Oiseau-Lyre. He also says of "The Fox:" "it was Warlock's last original composition. Towards the end of that year he took his own life."

As for the cricket song, which set up this train of thought last Thursday morning, Tomlinson writes that while most of the few songs of Warlock's last years, "almost all inspired by Bruce Blunt," are profoundly moving, the "exception is 'The Cricketers of Hambledon,' a rousing march written for the local brass band and chorus to enliven a cricket match on New Year's Day, 1929, when Blunt and the other 'Eskimos,' played J. C. Squire's 'Invalids' on the famous Broadhalfpenny Down, in protest against football's encroachment on the cricket season."

A nice thought, at a time when TV is sharing a Test match with World Cup football in the middle of June; and a cricket match of 1929 that ought, perhaps to have been recorded in "Wisden."

Ernest Bradbury

**WARLOCK. SONGS, PARTSONGS AND CAROLS.** \*Robert Tear (tenor). \*Geoffrey Parsons (piano), †Louis Halsey Singers conducted by Louis Halsey, with Wilfred Parry (piano), items marked ‡ transcribed Warlock. L'Oiseau-Lyre DSLO27 (£3.99).

*Songs\**. Sweet-and-twenty. Rest, sweet nymphs. The lover's maze. Sleep. Mockery. Pretty ring time. Hey trolly lolly lo‡. The jolly shepherd. Consider. And wilt thou leave me thus? Thou gav'st me leave to kiss. *Partsongst*. Mourn no more. The Lady's birthday‡ (with Wynford Evans, tenor). All the flowers of the spring. Call for the robin redbreast and the wren. One more river‡ (Stephen Varcoe, baritone). Lullaby. *Carols*. Benedicamus Domino‡. The first mercy. A Cornish Christmas Carol. As dewe in Apprylle‡. Bethlehem down. What cheer? good cheer!

So much Warlock has got into the catalogue since 1971 that it's getting hard to find anything that's not there already. However, diligent research on somebody's part has allowed Robert Tear to keep the well-known songs down to three and include eight that would not otherwise be available. Inevitably the unknowns are not all of the highest class; *Consider* really is rather ordinary. But the Wyatt setting, *And wilt thou leave me thus?*, is lovely and Tear sings it most beautifully. He is also excellent in *The jolly shepherd*, whose accompaniment skips drunkenly from key to key like the Gavotte in Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony, and in *Mockery*, whose end must surely make you grin. Neither singer nor pianist sounds comfortable in *The lover's maze* (but this is partly Warlock's fault), and I think myself that Tear should have gone *pianissimo* much earlier at the end of *Rest, sweet nymphs*. I liked the gentle approach to *Pretty ring time* which is usually sung too fast for a song marked *Allegretto*, but in that other much-recorded song, *Sleep*, I did feel the tempo was too slow; at this speed it is virtually impossible to

## THE GRAMOPHONE

sustain the piano epilogue. But it's a marvellous song and it's marvellously sung here.

Each side of this disc begins and ends with three partsongs, with or without piano, and the songs come in the middle. Most of these part songs are already in the catalogue, but they can hardly be better sung in the other versions, if as well. *Call for the robin redbreast* (women's voices) is a masterpiece, the end memorably original, and though the *Cornish Christmas Carol* outstays its welcome, the sensitive singing holds one gripped. The very soft singing at the end of *All the flowers* is beautifully controlled, but there is Warlockian joviality as well, at its best in *The Lady's Birthday*. All the music has been well recorded. Recommended.

R.F.

## RECORDS AND RECORDING

**WARLOCK:** *Songs, Partsongs and Carols*. Robert Tear (tenor), Wilfred Parry/Geoffrey Parsons (piano), The Louis Halsey Singers/Louis Halsey. L'Oiseau-Lyre DSLO 27. £3.99.

### PETER PIRIE

This is such a marvellous record that I must restrain myself in writing about it; everything about it is right. The recording is both intimate and icy clear, yet with the most beautiful ambience and aura of high harmonics; even at its quietest (and the dynamic range is wide) every detail tells. Robert Tear is excellent in the solo songs; his highly characterised light tenor voice is ideal for the songs he has chosen. The Louis Halsey singers have made a famous and much recommended record of Delius and Elgar part-songs (three stars in the Penguin Stereo Record Guide) and their singing here is if anything better; in fact their virtuosity places them very high among small choirs.

To take the songs first; side 1 has 'Sweet and Twenty', 'Rest Sweet Nymphs', 'The Lover's Maze', 'Sleep', and 'Mockery'. The performances of these are all quite straightforward, except for 'Sleep'. This is taken more slowly than I ever remember it, with a precise articulation, the pianist especially making a comma at the end of each phrase. The result is less eccentric than one might think, but it does throw a new light on the song. Otherwise nothing

unusual about the rest of these songs, which tend to be on the light side of Warlock's gamut: 'Peterisms' in mood and style.

The songs on side 2 are: 'Pretty Ring Time', 'Hey trolly lolly lo', 'The jolly shepherd', 'Consider, And wilt thou leave me thus?' and 'Thou gav'st me leave to kiss'. All these are on the light side too, except the exquisite 'Consider', one of Warlock's least known songs, but also one of his best; under a graceful guise it teaches a life's lesson, and one very dear to me, 'Consider the joy might lie in living, None striving, constraining none, and thinking not on death'. All these songs are most beautifully sung, and very finely accompanied. Decca, the parent company, recently issued a record of Warlock's songs, mostly the more serious ones, sung by Norman Bailey and again accompanied by Geoffrey Parsons. The two records might be considered complementary, only 'Sleep' and 'Pretty Ring Time' being duplicated, but I fear that Norman Bailey's huge voice and cavalier intonation cause me to recommend his record with caution. The present disc is stylistically far superior, as far as the solo songs go.

In the choral works it is unapproachable. There is a very useful Pearl record of choral music and songs, including 'The First Mercy' and 'Bethlehem Down', which is very acceptable, but not in this league. Warlock was the greatest carol composer of our time, and side 1 is devoted to carols: 'Benedicamus Domino', 'The

First Mercy', 'A Cornish Christmas Carol', then Robert Tear's first group, and the side ends with 'As dewe in Aprylle', 'Bethlehem Down', and 'What cheer? Good Cheer!' 'Bethlehem Down' must be one of the greatest carols in existence; no empty junketing this, but a poem (by Bruce Blunt) that sees the shadow of the cross falling across the crib. The words are painfully moving; and the performance is breathtaking.

Side 2, once more divided by Robert Tear's solo songs, has 'Mourn no More', 'The Lady's Birthday', 'All the flowers of the spring', 'Call for the robin redbreast', 'One more river' and 'Lullaby'. The presence of 'Call for the robin redbreast' as well as 'All the flowers of the Spring', means that we at last have all the *Three Dirges* of Webster on record, since the Pearl disc has 'The Shrouding of the Duchess of Malfi'. These tortured, complex part-songs are among Warlock's masterpieces, and the performances they get here is of a subtlety, virtuosity and depth that it will be very hard to equal. All this music, whether it be outrageously cheerful or 'grisly', to use Warlock's word, is superbly performed and superbly recorded. Readers of Cecil Gray's biography of Warlock will recall his devastating outburst to Gray after hearing his part-songs butchered by a, for the time, all too typical English choir. The Halsey Singers sing as if to rectify that tragedy, with a beauty and dedication that makes this a rare record indeed.

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Given at the 1978 AGM

We do tend to have informal Chairman's Reports, as I see little point in repeating information already circulated in Newsletters or repeated elsewhere in the meeting.

My first plan was to give a talk based on yet another chart I have been compiling. I haven't decided whether it should be called Biogeographical or Geobiographical, but it must have a capital PH! The chart in question gives all the addresses where PH is known to have stayed (about 120 of them), with the relevant dates. With the aid of a few maps I was going to take you on a guided tour of PH's life.

However, I had a rehearsal to see how long it would take. When I found that after 25 minutes I was barely a third of the way through, it was obvious that a postponement would be desirable - possibly till the coach-trip if our projected jaunt comes off.

Which brings me to my next point. Various suggestions for pub-crawls have been made over the years. The only one that ever came off was the famous occasion when the then Secretary had forgotten to book a room for a committee meeting and we wandered from pub to pub looking for a quiet corner!

PH would be the first to agree that London nowadays is not really worthwhile. Several of his haunts remain, of course, but nearly all of them now dispense rubbish.

Cefn Bryntalch is an obvious place for Warlockians to visit, and with an overnight stop we could take in the Wye Valley on the way and the Cotswolds (and perhaps Oxford) on the way back.

Another jaunt we hope to organise is a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the famous cricket match at Hambledon on New Year's Day. We ought to arrange a match on Broadhalfpenny Down - perhaps between the P.W. Society and the press, to get some useful publicity - followed by a sing-song, either at Hambledon or back in London. (Plans for this fell through for various reasons. Seeing how the weather turned out on the day, it is possibly just as well).

I am disappointed in the almost total lack of response to the competition announced in Newsletter No.21. Only one item has so far been identified. I hope the other mysteries will be cleared up in time.

I would like to refer to our projected publications scheme, which will be discussed later on in this meeting. It will be our most ambitious undertaking and it is essential for all of us to support it.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee members for their support during the year.

Fred Tomlinson