

Caractacus, op 35

A cantata in six scenes for soprano, tenor, baritone and two bass soloists, full choir and orchestra. Libretto by H A Acworth. The work is normally performed with an interval after the third scene.

Approximate Length:	100 minutes
First Performance:	
Date :	5 October 1898
Venue :	Leeds Festival
Conductor:	the composer
Commissioned by:	Leeds Festival Committee
Dedicated to:	H M Queen Victoria

Elgar's love of the Malvern Hills is well known but it was his mother, Ann Elgar, who first suggested that he should write a work set on the hills. Caractacus tells the story of a British chieftain who fought the Roman invaders. Eventually defeated at the British Camp on the Malvern Hills (the earthworks of which can still be visited today), Caractacus was taken to Rome for trial but so impressed Emperor Claudius that he was pardoned.

Elgar chose a neighbour in Malvern, H A Acworth, as his librettist. Acworth took some liberties with history by introducing a love interest, while Elgar himself responded to the patriotic fervour of the times - he began composition some months after Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee - with a swaggering triumphal march which dominates the final scene. This remains the best known of the work's music but it gives a false impression of what is otherwise a notably pastoral work. The third scene begins with a woodland interlude which in particular reflects the woods and trees of the Malvern area in which Elgar found his inspiration.

The work is rarely performed today and cannot be counted as one of Elgar's best works. It does however represent an important step in Elgar's development, coming only two years before *The Dream of Gerontius*.