



Branch Chairman's message

In view of the significance for Elgar of that delightful perennial, the *anemone nemorosa*, we can all take hope from our first sighting of the windflower, not only that spring has arrived but that the various restrictions which society has been forced to endure are gradually being lifted.

As the politicians are fond of reminding us: it's been a challenging year. Here at the Yorkshire & North East branch we have met the challenge in various ways. Most importantly, we have maintained our programme of talks, almost without interruption, by means of that technological miracle, the remote electronic platforms, especially Zoom. We took a degree of satisfaction in being the first branch to embrace the technology when, in May 2020, Christopher Wiltshire gave his trailblazing presentation, followed by Stuart Freed (June), Peter Newble (September, via Vimeo), Bernard Porter (November), and Steven Halls (March). We are extremely grateful to all these speakers not only for rising to the technological challenge but for such highly informative and enjoyable occasions, and we look forward to more on-line meetings in April, May and June.

By the time of our scheduled meeting in September, we should be out of lockdown and back at our home, the Bar Convent, York. But this raises an important question: do we continue as before, as if nothing had happened, or do we learn from the experience and modify our operations? Let us not forget that Zoom meetings have attracted a wider audience than those at the Bar Convent. This is because relatively large numbers of guests from other branches have joined us, including those who would not have been able to attend otherwise because of limited mobility or other reasons.

With these thoughts in mind, I will be writing soon to seek your views on the way ahead, once lockdown is lifted – i.e., your preference for live meetings, virtual meetings, or a combination of the two.

I do hope you enjoy this edition of the *Newsletter*, and its interesting articles by Philip Scowcroft and the *Newsletter* editor, Paul Kampen, and I look forward to seeing you all again whether on screen or 'in the flesh'.

David Young - Branch Chairman

Our Meetings for the Remainder of 2021

By Zoom: 17th April: David Owen Norris – Elgar and the Note A flat (***Please note the change of date***). **22nd May:** Martin Firth – Nostalgia and 'Englishness' in Elgar

26th June: Richard Westwood-Brookes – Elgar's Violin Concerto

Please contact the Secretary at: yorkshire-NE@elgar.org if you wish to attend.

It is hoped that we will be able to resume normal 'face-to-face' meetings at the Bar Convent, Blossom Street, York in September.

25th September: Andrew Padmore – Conducting Elgar.

23rd October: John Norris – Elgar Archives at the British Museum.

27th November: Tom Kelly – Elgar's Enigmatic Variations.

We look forward to meeting you all again then!

Elgar and Thomas Dunhill By Philip Scowcroft

As England's greatest native-born composer, Sir Edward Elgar has been well-served by a succession of biographers, from R.J. Buckley – who was remarkably early in the field in 1905 – followed by Basil Maine (1930 – a substantial, if hagiographical survey), two books by W.H. Reed – one (1930) biographical, the other (1936) reminiscence. And an ever-growing number of post-war essays: Diana McVeagh, twice now, Michael Kennedy, four times if we count updated editions, Percy Young, who produced almost an Elgar library including a biography, editions of his letters and a study of his lectures at Birmingham among other things, the mighty Jerrold Northrop Moore and several others. One other pre-war example I have only relatively recently read for the first time is by Thomas Dunhill which, when it first appeared in 1938, was unique, apart from W.H. Reed as being the only biography at that time by one who was also a composer (whom Elgar, with a certain generosity, admired).



Generally speaking, Dunhill's compositions are now not often heard, though in July 2016 Scunthorpe, where Dunhill spent his last years (1942-1946) 'did its bit' with a three-week celebration of his musical world¹ - songs, chamber music (a *Phantasy Trio* and a Piano Quartet), music for piano solo and for four hands at one piano, teaching pieces for piano – appropriately played by local pupils – choral music both sacred and secular, including the choral ballad *Tubal-Cain*,² thus representing all Dunhill's output bar his orchestral music, which includes a symphony, and his comic opera. Dunhill wrote several readable, yet scholarly, books about music including the one about Elgar which is part biography, part study, concise but telling of Elgar's music.

It begins with a chapter putting Elgar in the context of British music and ends with a bibliography up to 1938 and his own reminiscences of Elgar. Its view of the music is sympathetic but it is not without criticism. In this latter there are, not surprisingly, statements that one can disagree with. I am amazed that Dunhill, who wrote some fine chamber music which should be heard more often, thinks relatively little of Elgar's late chamber works. He concentrates on Elgar's major works, which is perhaps only to be expected, but is sympathetic to the early choral music like *The Black Knight* and *King Olaf*, if less so to *Caractacus* and to Elgar's occasional pieces, notably *Carillon*. He prefers the First Symphony to the Second and prefers *Falstaff* to both, dealing comprehensively with it, given the comparative brevity of his book.

Whether I agree with all of Dunhill's conclusions or not, his book is stimulating and it has something to say to us over eighty years on. It is out of print but if an Elgar devotee could find a copy,³ they would be well rewarded.

Notes:

1. Performances were mostly by local musicians like Jonathan Goosing and his wife Claire Wheat. The Doncaster lunch-hour concerts, with which I have been associated for 55 years, have also featured Dunhill's music – songs, piano solos and duets – in recent years.
2. *The Vulcan of Hades*
3. The copy that I read was loaned to me by a Dunhill descendant at the time of the Scunthorpe 'celebration' which he much enjoyed.

Philip L. Scowcroft, August 2016, revised March 2020 and February 2021

For more information on Thomas Dunhill and his music see:

stainer.co.uk/composer/thomas-dunhill/

Barbirolli in Leeds by Paul A. Kampen

The North West Branch's Vimeo presentation on Sir John Barbirolli and its subsequent Zoom discussion set me thinking: 'what is known about Sir John's Leeds years?' Sir John's time as Musical Director of the Scottish Orchestra (now the Royal Scottish National Orchestra) is well known. This period lasted from 1932 until he went to the New York Philharmonic in 1936; at about the same time Sir John was Chief Conductor of the Northern Philharmonic Orchestra in Leeds. However you will find no reference at all to this in any of the books charting the life and career of Sir John Barbirolli – Michael Kennedy, Charles Reid etc. You will though find very brief references to the Leeds Symphony Orchestra. As we all know, the Leeds Symphony is a very highly respected and old established amateur orchestra but the Northern Philharmonic was undoubtedly a professional organisation so I decided to explore further.

Graham Hills' book on the history of this orchestra charts its history from 1890 until 1990 and from it we learn that the orchestra was run by the Leeds Symphony Society. Was this the Leeds Symphony Orchestra which appears to have morphed at some point into the Northern Philharmonic? There is a clue in Graham Hills' book: from 1902 to 1921 the leader of the Leeds Symphony Society's Orchestra was Edward Maude who lived from 1880 to 1967; he was a professional violinist and became not only the leader of the Northern Philharmonic but also the man who persuaded the young John Barbirolli to take over its musical directorship. The Leeds website says that Mr Maude was associated with the Leeds Symphony Orchestra and Northern Philharmonic from 1908. I just wonder if 1908 was the year when a professional orchestra broke away from the current Leeds Symphony Orchestra? However, another source (*Music in the West Riding of Yorkshire*, Edited by Adrian Smith and Published by R.H. Wood in 2000) traces the Northern Philharmonic Orchestra/Leeds Symphony Orchestra back to an *ad hoc* professional ensemble called 'The Leeds Permanent Orchestra' formed in 1903. This will be the subject of further research.

Here we can profitably look at the BBC Genome: from this we learn that the Leeds Symphony Orchestra made regular broadcasts from 1928 and from then on seems to have broadcast at least twice per year, mainly conducted by Julius Harrison, a big name in those days, with an occasional extra broadcast also involving choirs. These were sometimes billed as 'A Regional Programme' and sometimes as from '2ZY Manchester'. One broadcast was conducted, not led, by Edward Maude, from Leeds Town Hall on 23rd January 1932. The programme included Vaughan-Williams's overture *The Wasps* and Beethoven's 6th Symphony. The interval talk was given by Miss Lettice U. Cooper and was on the subject of Dick Turpin legends. On 17th February 1934, for the first time, the name of John Barbirolli appears – of course he was not Sir John then. Interestingly, this concert marks the first time when Edward Maude was identified as leader; previously the leader is not named. On the programme was music not necessarily associated with Sir John in later years: Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, orchestral excerpts from Rimsky-Korsakoff's opera *The Golden Cockerel*, Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto with Benno Moiseiwitsch as soloist and Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No 2 for which the solo players are named. Moiseiwitsch was, of course, an internationally famed soloist and was so until his death in 1963 and would not have come cheap. The Brandenburg soloists included the legendary trumpet player John Paley, who was presumably the principal trumpet of the orchestra although he was known for the very high 'clarino' style of trumpet playing, often called for by Bach and Handel, which few players could tackle in those days so he may have been bought in for the occasion. I would like to know more about the named oboe and cello soloists who would have been principal players for the orchestra (Edward Maude is of course the violinist); unfortunately the Musicians Union records for Leeds in that era were lost a long time ago so that avenue of research is closed. By the way, all players in those days would have been union members with the closed shop being rigidly enforced until

just before it became illegal in recent times. That is pertinent to the story as Barbirolli, having risen from the ranks of the orchestra, must have been an MU member but his relations with that august institution were known to have been fractious in the early 50s.

Edward Maud's son recounted how he was introduced to 33-year-old John Barbirolli whom he described as 'a diminutive figure with thick black hair and a bent nose'. The bent nose was apparently the result of his having been a rather unsuccessful flyweight boxer in his youth. Barbirolli was quick to introduce the music of Elgar into the programmes; Elgar of course knew Leeds well and many of his choral works had been heard at the Town Hall. The Violin Concerto, with Albert Sammons as soloist was performed in 1934 – the year that Elgar died – and the Second Symphony in 1935. It appears that Barbirolli also made some personnel changes in the orchestra, insisted on auditions for players and increased rehearsal time. I doubt therefore if all was sweetness and light.



The Northern Philharmonic Orchestra in Leeds Town Hall with John Barbirolli and Benno Moiseiwitsch. February 1934.

Photo: Leeds Local and Family History Library

If we go back to the BBC Genome we see that the orchestra continued to broadcast regularly up to 1936 – first appearing as the Northern Philharmonic Orchestra on 2nd November 1935. This and another on 7th December that year were the last conducted by John Barbirolli. In 1936 he took

over the New York Philharmonic, initially as a guest for 10 weeks but staying until 1943.

Other names such as Heinz Unger, Malcolm Sargent and Albert Coates appear as guest conductors; these were big names of the day and Albert Coates was the villain in the sad tale of the premiere of Elgar's Cello Concerto. Virtually all the broadcasts that I can find were from Leeds Town Hall with the exception of one from Sheffield City Hall. And there is a health warning here: the BBC Genome does not necessarily record every broadcast ever made so there may have been more.

After 1936 the orchestra seems to have broadcast less and then mainly accompanying choirs. On 26th November 1935 they appeared in Elgar's *The Kingdom* conducted by Sir Edward Bairstow. For some years I can find nothing until, on 17 August 1944 they travelled to the Victoria Hall, Hanley, to accompany the North Staffordshire Choral Society – music by Handel and Hamilton Harty. Hanley of course is Hallé territory and I wonder if John Barbirolli, touring wartime Britain with the orchestra which he had reconstructed using what he called 'the flatfooted and slightly maimed', threw his old band a gig to help them out when the Hallé had a better date somewhere else?

So lots of questions remain to be answered here: which orchestra became the professional Leeds Symphony Orchestra? Why was the name changed to The Northern Philharmonic Orchestra and whose idea was it? Why were the orchestra's broadcasting activities curtailed? And why did they cease? These, and many other questions, I hope to be able to answer in a future article or talk. And of course, if you already have the answers - or any other information - please get in touch.

Paul A. Kampen, April 2021