

Gustav Holst: The Final Years – Lecture at English Music Festival May 2019

At the end of June 1919, Holst returned to the UK having spent eight months away on war service in Salonika in Greece. He was reunited with his wife Isobel in Thaxted. They had never been apart for so long.

Holst resumed his usual activities, teaching at St Paul's Girls' School and at Morley College, conducting, composing and walking.

In August 1919, he began work on the *Ode to Death*. This work was motivated by the waste of life and the futility of war. The words were by Walt Whitman. It is a particularly fine, but neglected work.

In the late summer of 1919, Holst began work on his satirical opera, *The Perfect Fool*. He needed a librettist. He turned to Clifford Bax who declined. He didn't think that the plot was very amusing. Holst decided to do it himself.

There were increasing numbers of performances of *The Planets*. However, from time to time, he was asked to conduct movements from *The Planets*, ending with *Jupiter*, considered to be a more positive note than *Neptune*. Holst disliked this, but accepted that even truncated performances did publicise the new work.

He was invited and accepted a new teaching appointment at University College Reading. He was also taken on the staff at the Royal College of Music. Because of these commitments, he resigned from James Allen's Girls' School. Nevertheless, this still left him with four teaching positions.

The Reading appointment involved teaching composition. He made pupils question the value of every note. He said that he wanted his pupils to promise him that they would never read a textbook on harmony.

Arthur Bliss took his *Two Studies for Orchestra* to Holst. Holst immediately pounced on a tune weakly given to the 'cellos. He said, "This is a trombone line. It cannot be anything else". Bliss was in complete agreement.

Looking at the second study and reaching the end of the second page, Holst turned to Bliss and asked, "When is it going to begin?"

This seems very much reminiscent of the way that Stanford taught. Perhaps the most telling remark made by Holst was, "Never compose anything, unless the not composing of it becomes a positive nuisance to you".

He would never bring his own music to the attention of students, but did with other composers and in particular Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G Minor* and Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, the latter due to its "brilliant orchestration".

The first two performances of his choral work *The Hymn of Jesus* were given in March 1920. They made a deep impression on the audience. Donald Tovey wrote, "It completely bowls me over. If anybody doesn't like it, he doesn't like life".

By 1923, the work had sold 8,500 copies and that was through just one edition, such was the work's enormous popularity. It is regarded as Holst's second finest composition.

In the summer of 1920, Holst decided to resurrect the Whitsun festival. Thaxted was no longer possible due to Conrad Noel's obsession with communism and having the red flag flown within his church. The festival was held at Dulwich. It included the first performance of Holst's *Short Festival Te Deum* which had been composed in 1919. There was also a performance (the first) of the *Kyrie* from Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G Minor*.

In July 1920 there was the first performance of Holst's *Two Psalms* which had been composed back in 1912. It was given in the open air at St James' Park in Newcastle before a crowd of 20,000. The choir numbered 800. The orchestra 100. There was a brass band of 30 players. Oh for a recording of this particular occasion.

He began work in earnest on the music for *The Perfect Fool*, having by now completed the libretto.

The first public performance of *The Planets* was given by the LSO on 15th November 1920. It received a tremendous ovation. Holst was called on stage. He was mystified and embarrassed by the response from the audience.

Meanwhile in the USA, the Chicago and New York Symphony Orchestras were competing with one another as to who would give the *Planets'* first performance in the States. In the end, they compromised and the work was performed by both orchestras on the same day.

Holst was becoming increasingly pestered by journalists and gossip columnists. He detested interviews and photographers. The public wanted sensational information about well-known personalities. Nothing new there. Holst would not indulge which rather set the seal on his eventual fall from favour.

The first South East London Musical Festival was held in April 1921. There were vocal classes, instrumental events, string and full orchestral classes. Under Holst's direction, Morley College won all the prizes.

In June 1921, the first performance was given of Holst's mini-opera *Savitri*. It was a great success. Holst was called on stage many times. The *Times* described it as a perfect little masterpiece. The *Musical Times* said that the music was everything – a new flavour in modernism.

The Hymn of Jesus was performed at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford in September 1921. This was the first Three Choirs Festival at Hereford since 1912, due to the First World War. The *Musical Times* described the work as “one of the most original choral works that have been produced for many years past”.

After the Three Choirs Festival in September 1921, Holst, Vaughan Williams and W G Whittaker (a conductor and musician friend) set off from Hereford on a walking tour. Whittaker took his camera. There are some fascinating photographs, which the Holst Society have included in our bi-monthly newsletters.

Holst was becoming increasingly hailed for his conducting abilities. He was intolerant of slap-dash playing. But he would stop a rehearsal to congratulate an individual on an exceptional piece of playing. Holst had a magnetic influence over the performers. His conducting was so expressive that it showed in the performances given.

Holst was approached to compose the ballet for a work by an American choreographer called Alice Barney. Holst completed the work at speed in the autumn of 1921 entitling it *The Lure*. The ballet was never performed. The Music remained unplayed and unpublished for many years.

Publishers were now very receptive to Holst's music and many of his works previously rejected were now being published. He was invited to set music to Cecil Spring Rice's *I Vow to Thee My Country* and found that the theme from *Jupiter* fitted the words perfectly.

Although having no interest in material possessions, Holst was gratified to be given Beethoven's tuning fork which he treasured. On his death, he left it to Vaughan Williams.

The ballet music for *The Perfect Fool* was performed at the Queen's Hall. The idea was to whet the public's appetite for the complete opera. The public liked what they heard.

At Easter in 1922, Holst cycled from London to Bournemouth. Arriving at the home of Dan Godfrey, the conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on Easter Sunday morning, Mrs Godfrey opened a window to see a dishevelled cyclist with a mud-splattered haversack. Believing that this was the delivery of the Sunday papers, she told Holst to leave them in the porch and closed the window. He was eventually admitted.

A few days later, Holst turned up at the home of Thomas Hardy in Dorchester. He was wearing an old Panama hat, a favourite amongst photographers. On arrival, Mrs Hardy refused Holst admission on the grounds that Thomas never saw photographers. Fortunately, Holst had brought his invitation and was duly admitted.

At the end of the summer term in 1922, Holst received a copy of the complete *Mass in G Minor* from Vaughan Williams. It was dedicated to Holst and his Whitsuntide

singers. There were doubts as to whether the Morley students would ever learn it, due to its difficulty, but they did.

Holst began composing his *Fugal Overture*. It was meant to be an overture, but was also a fugue and a dance. He nearly called it his ballet fugue but wisely decided not to. There is plenty of syncopation and cross-rhythms in the music, which is very much reminiscent of Ravel's *Piano Trio* of 1914.

Incidentally, that first chord is CDEGA and it works.

Holst's music was beginning to be heard on the Continent. *The Planets* was performed in Vienna. *Beni Mora* was heard in Paris, Poland and Geneva.

Holst completed the opera *The Perfect Fool*. However, he needed help in the completion of the full score and the vocal score. He was ably assisted by students. However, the exercise took some six weeks.

The LSO then recorded *The Planets* under Holst. This was the first recording. *Jupiter* was issued on its own in March 1923.

The Planets and *The Ode to Death* were given at the Leeds Triennial Festival in October. Holst was astonished to find that he was a celebrity. He had to be escorted to the local police station in order to escape the attention of admirers and autograph-hunters.

He was being called upon regularly to conduct his own music. There was much train travel. He would be in Cambridge, York, London, Newcastle, Birmingham and then the Three Choirs Festival, all in short order. He also had to juggle this with his four teaching appointments. His diary was becoming dangerously overcrowded.

He completed the full score of *The Fugal Overture* after the Christmas holidays on 4th January 1923.

Holst was much involved (concerts and lectures) in the celebrations of the tercentenaries of William Byrd and Thomas Weelkes, both of whom he greatly admired.

In February 1923, whilst rehearsing a concert at Reading University, he slipped off the rostrum and suffered a head injury, the consequences from which remained with him for the rest of his life.

Shortly thereafter, Holst gave up teaching at Reading University. He then suffered a nervous breakdown and was ordered to take a complete rest. Others took over his teaching commitments.

He was then invited to lecture at the University of Michigan. In April 1923, Holst and Isobel sailed on the *Aquitania*. During the voyage, he composed the *Fugal Concerto*

for *Flute, Oboe and Strings*. The first performance of this new work was given by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in May 1923.

Holst was also to conduct his own music at the Ann Arbor May Festival. Halfway through his *Dirge for Two Veterans* before an audience of 4,000, Holst suddenly stopped the piece, announced that there was a mistake in the orchestral parts, went over to the third trombone, got out his pencil, corrected the mistakes, restarted the work and finished to tumultuous applause.

Later, Holst admitted that he had been wrong. The trombone part had been correct all along.

He was offered the job of professor of music at Michigan University which he declined. However, he said at the time that he would have accepted the appointment ten years before. And, I wonder where that would have led.

He was also offered the appointment of director of music at the Eastman School of Music at Rochester, New York. That he also declined.

Holst and Imogen visited Chicago in June 1923 and also Niagara Falls.

Holst's absence from the UK meant that he missed the first performance of *The Perfect Fool* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in May 1923. Both the public and the critics were baffled by the opera. Holst's intention was to satirise opera, sending up the music of Wagner, Verdi, Debussy, Strauss and many others. As these were popular composers to opera regulars, Holst's satirising didn't go down very well at all. The spirit of high comedy was not appreciated. The title of the opera didn't help either. It was generally accepted that for Holst to have written the libretto was a bad idea. Fortunately, most of those who attended liked the music.

By the end of June 1923, Holst was back in the UK. He attended a performance of *The Perfect Fool*, which was coupled with a performance of *Savitri*. The critics didn't like that either. Nevertheless, they had liked it previously.

Holst recorded the rest of *The Planets* in the autumn of 1923 in a cramped recording studio. In those days, there was no possibility of editing. Each side of a disc had to be recorded without error. *Venus* was recorded no less than 13 times.

He returned to conducting. By the end of the Christmas term in 1923, Holst was exhausted. He was also being constantly harassed by journalists and autograph-hunters. The head injury which he had suffered at Reading also brought on bouts of insomnia.

He was offered honorary degrees and the chairmanship of musical organisations. He was invited to lecture, he was requested to conduct and to attend performance of his own music. Most of this was rejected as he simply didn't have the time.

A director of Rolls Royce then, unexpectedly, made Holst a gift of £1,500 to enable him to spend more time on composition. A wage of £1,500 in 1923 would be the equivalent of a salary today of £290,000. Put it another way, if you were buying goods worth £1,500 in 1923, that would be the equivalent of at least £84,000 today. Whatever way you look at it, the gift was astonishingly generous. This enabled Holst to cut down on his teaching commitments and as a result, he remained in Thaxted for much of the week. As a consequence, he was able to start work on his *Choral Symphony* which he had completed by the May of 1924. He used poems by John Keats. However, he rather messed around with the texts drawing disapproval from literary purists.

In February 1924, Holst was due to conduct *The Cloud Messenger* in Newcastle. However, he was taken ill and had to cancel. The old head injury was the problem. On medical advice, he cancelled all engagements for the rest of the year and remained in Thaxted.

He was then elected a fellow of the Royal College of Music. This was the only academic award that he ever accepted.

Such was Holst's fame that his absence for the rest of 1924 was even reported in the *Times*. In the summer, he resigned as music director of Morley College (a position that he had held since 1907). One of his successors was the composer Sir Michael Tippett.

Times were changing. One could now hear music on the radio or purchase a gramophone record. Many of Holst's works were being broadcast, together with the music of other composers. Of this modern music, Holst said, "It's neither modern, nor music". Curiously, he was much fascinated by the music of Anton Webern. I wonder how many in this room tonight share Holst's fascination.

He did some recordings including *The St Paul's Suite*. He said at the time (August 1924) that his gramophone royalties kept him from bankruptcy. This seems to be an odd comment, Holst having only at the end of 1923 received the sum of £1,500. Surely, he had not spent it already.

Holst composed some music for piano including a toccata for Adine O'Neill, wife of the composer Norman O'Neill. However, he wasn't particularly keen on the instrument which he described as "being scarcely a musical instrument at all". He was also irritated that due to his neuritis, he had difficulty playing piano pieces himself.

He composed *The Evening Watch* for eight-part unaccompanied chorus. However, this had a limited appeal for audiences. It needed an accomplished choir. Novello decided against publication. However, Curwen published the work in 1925. After the *Times* described it as a "barren construction", it shortly thereafter went out of print. It wasn't until 1965 that it was rescued by Faber.

Holst then started work on a new opera *At the Boar's Head*. The text was taken from Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. He said at the time that as the critics had decided that he couldn't write a libretto (*The Perfect Fool*), he'd use Shakespeare instead. He also took some 40 traditional melodies which he expertly wove into the score and which also included much of his own music.

Friends then collected £350 (the equivalent of over £20,000 today) for Holst's 50th birthday. I wonder how many in this room received £20,000 on their 50th birthday.

1924 also saw the passing of Stanford, who had taught Holst composition at the RCM.

In October 1924, Holst was awarded the Henry Elias Howland Memorial Prize by Yale University. There was also a cheque for \$1,350 or £15,315 in today's money.

At the Boar's Head was given its inaugural performance on 3rd April 1925 at the Manchester Opera House conducted by Malcolm Sargent. It was not a success. There was much valid criticism. The lead singer was taken ill right at the last minute. The understudy was given four days' notice. He had to take the score on stage suitably disguised, but no one was fooled. It was given a firm 'thumbs down'. Actually, it's really quite fun.

Holst composed the *Terzetto* for flute, oboe and viola. Each part had its own key signature – an interesting idea. Ravel had done something similar in 1922. Holst liked the piece, but audiences and performers did not.

He composed a second motet (*The Evening Watch* was the first) entitled *Sing me the Men*. The poet laureate Robert Bridges held the copyright of the words. Bridges duly assigned copyright to Holst. Holst then looked at Bridges' output. This resulted in seven part-songs for female voices with words by Bridges.

In August 1925, Holst was in Germany and Switzerland for a holiday and also did some lecturing.

At the Three Choirs in September 1925, Holst conducted the first performance of *The Evening Watch*. Many were disconcerted. One critic remarked, "No one liked the music". Many thought that there were too many unresolved dissonances.

The First Choral Symphony was given its first performance at Leeds in October 1925. It was successful. However, the subsequent London performance was not. Critics were appalled at the way that Holst had treated Keats' poetry. "This is probably Holst's worst work", said one. Vaughan Williams himself felt only "cold admiration". The work did not become part of choral societies' repertoire.

It is significant that from this point Holst's popularity started to decline. The public realised that there would be no more works like *The Planets*. But Holst wasn't going to change to appease public sentiment.

He continued to give lectures, extolling the virtues of Purcell and Vaughan Williams in particular. In April 1926 he went on a four-day walking tour of Dorset and Wiltshire. This gave Holst the inspiration for his next work, *Egdon Heath*.

With the introduction of electrical recording techniques, Holst was invited to record *The Planets* again. This gave much improved sound quality.

Cheltenham, where Holst was born in 1874, then decided in March 1927 to hold a Holst festival for its most famous son. It included five of Holst's works and of course, *The Planets*. An oil painting by Bernard Munns was commissioned. It now hangs at the Birthplace Museum.

The New York Symphony Orchestra then commissioned Holst to write an orchestral work. This became *Egdon Heath*, which Holst dedicated to Thomas Hardy. In August 1927, Holst took the train to Bristol and then walked to Dorchester to see Hardy (as you do). Hardy was delighted to accept the dedication.

Holst was offered the conductorship of the Bach Choir in succession to Vaughan Williams. The press release announcing the appointment appeared in January 1928 but unfortunately Holst had to decline on doctors' advice.

George Bell, Dean of Canterbury Cathedral, invited Holst to produce a work for performance at the Cathedral. It had to convey a religious message. The text was by John Macefield (a future poet laureate). The Archbishop of Canterbury approved. However, the organist, C Charlton Palmer, did not. He turned out to be totally obstructive.

Holst received a substantial gift from Balfour Gardiner, the composer and philanthropist. A barn at Holst's Thaxted property was then converted into a music room. This enabled Holst to complete *Egdon Heath*.

The BBC commissioned a new work for military band for which the fee was to be £50. Holst wanted to arrange a work by Bach before embarking upon the commission as he was feeling rather rusty about the idiom of writing for a military band. The BBC offered to pay Holst £25 for that as well.

In mid-December 1917, Holst visited Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and then back to Germany and home. He was away for a month. During that time, he met the composer Janáček.

Holst conducted *Egdon Heath* at Cheltenham in February 1928. The performance was a homage to Hardy who had recently died. The conductor, Sir Adrian Boult, had difficulty comprehending the work. However, he subsequently said that it grew on him after repeated hearings. Even Isobel was not impressed. She wrote to Sir Hugh Allen and said, "I wish you could stop Gustav writing music like this and get him back to his old style". One critic said, "Whereas the first choral symphony was stillborn,

Egdon Heath can scarcely be said to have been born at all". However, today, *Egdon Heath* is seen to embody all the characteristic features of Holst's mature style.

He was in Chester in April 1928 from where he took a train to Kidderminster. He then walked to Shrewsbury (34 miles). He began work on his final opera *The Wandering Scholar*, a one-act opera. He said at the time that he had learnt many lessons from his previous operatic forages.

The Canterbury work became *The Coming of Christ* and was first performed at Whitsun 1928. It was the first drama performance in an English Cathedral since the Middle Ages. The devout were outraged and said that God's judgment would speedily follow. It didn't. Six thousand heard performances of the work.

Holst then set off for a two-day walking break from Ashford to Rye and on to Winchelsea. He composed the transcription of the Bach work which he had previously wanted to do. He chose the *Gigue Fugue* which he didn't think had been effective for organ.

In September 1928, the test piece at the National Brass Band Festival was Holst's *Moorside Suite* which the Festival had commissioned. The competition was won by the Black Dyke Mills Band. It is now one of the most performed works for brass band.

On 20th December 1928, Holst left the UK for Italy. As usual, he went alone and left his wife Isobel at home. He also visited Greece. Whilst he was away, he received the shocking news of the death of Jane Joseph at the age of 35 – "The best girl pupil I ever had".

Following his return, Holst sailed from Liverpool on 6th April 1929 for the USA. He returned a month later. Whilst he was away, he attended dinners, concerts and gave lectures. He was also reunited with his brother Emil, by then a successful Hollywood actor of the silent screen.

During the summer, he composed the *Twelve Songs* to poems by Humbert Wolfe and the *Double Concerto for Two Violins*. These were three short movements to be played without a break.

In October 1929, Holst and Imogen travelled to Paris for the first French performance of *Egdon Heath*. The audience hissed.

There were the usual field days between Holst and Vaughan Williams. On this particular occasion, they were studying Vaughan Williams' score for the ballet *Job*. Vaughan Williams accepted a number of Holst's suggestions. Then later, at the rehearsal, Holst leapt to his feet and suggested further changes. It was generally accepted that from 'thick obscurity' emerged clarity.

In November 1929, Holst spent six days in Paris where he met Nadia Boulanger. He conducted a concert of the twelve Humbert Wolfe songs, which were sung in French. This was perhaps a good thing for they were well received.

The Wandering Scholar was completed in January 1930. In April 1930, Holst was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society. This was presented at the première of the Double Concerto. One critic described the double concerto as “absolutely threadbare”. In April 1930 Holst went on a two-week walking tour of Holland.

On his return, he composed the *Choral Fantasia* for chorus and organ, which had been commissioned by Herbert Sumsion (organist of Gloucester Cathedral) for the forthcoming Three Choirs Festival. It was dedicated to Robert Graves who had just died.

Holst then realised that he had to make some progress with the BBC commission. He started work on what became *Hammersmith* in the summer of 1930. He had lived there for some 40 years. The music covers the ebb and flow of the river in contrast to the good-humoured people who lived in such overcrowded conditions, at the time.

He also began work on the *Twelve Welsh Songs*.

He re-scored *Hammersmith* for full orchestra during the early part of 1931. He was then approached to write a film score, *The Bells*. He even appeared in the film as an extra. Of the music, he said “that it makes me purr and feel good all over”. Sadly, the film had to be cut and so did the music. When Holst attended a private viewing, he was dismayed that the sound was of such poor quality. Furthermore, it bore little resemblance to what he had composed and recorded. Imogen, who attended the review with her father, described Holst’s “white-faced look of dismay” as the film progressed. The film was never shown. It was sold to the USA and lost, as was the music. Nothing remains.

Hammersmith was completed as a piece for military band and was duly handed over to the BBC. It was rehearsed, but never performed until decades after Holst’s death. One has to assume that the BBC paid the £50.

It is generally considered that the arrangement for military band is far more effective than the orchestral arrangement of *Hammersmith*.

In September 1931, at the Three Choirs Festival, Holst’s music included the *Fugue à la Gigue*, *The Hymn of Jesus* and *The Choral Fantasia*. The latter was a world première. The critics were not impressed, particularly with the start on a D and a C# below that. Vaughan Williams found the performance moving which mattered far more to Holst than the views of the critics.

The orchestral arrangement of *Hammersmith* was performed at the Queen’s Hall in London in November 1931. The programme also included the first London

performance of *Belshazzar's Feast* by William Walton. Holst's piece did not make a strong impression. On the other hand, Walton's did.

In January 1932, Holst sailed on the Bremen for the USA to take the post of Horatio Lamb lecturer in composition at Harvard for the period February to May 1932. He was also to conduct the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He conducted three concerts with the BSO in a week, all entirely devoted to his own music. He attended the theatre in New York and watched his brother and niece in performances. He found life in New York incredibly hectic, especially the use of the telephone. He said, "New Yorkers rush to the phone as inveterate smokers do to cigarettes". There were dinners and lectures.

He also met Nat Shilkret, director of the popular band The Victor Orchestra. He commissioned Holst to write a piece based on English or American folk tunes.

At the same time, Elliott Carter studied composition with Holst as a graduate student. Holst visited Canada where he gave a lecture and also conducted.

Holst was due to give the first performance of the military band arrangement of *Hammersmith* in the April. He was also due to lecture on Haydn at the Library of Congress. He began work on the piece commissioned by Shilkret.

Having given the lecture, Holst was taken ill and rushed to hospital. He was diagnosed with suffering from a duodenal ulcer. He was haemorrhaging and lost four pints of blood. He was unable to conduct the première of *Hammersmith*. However, the performance did go ahead.

After a short time he was well enough to make an arrangement for strings of *The Moorside Suite* which was to be performed at St Paul's Girls' School.

On 27th April, a concert was given in his honour by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He said that it was the happiest night that he had had in the USA.

In early May, Holst completed the Shilkret piece. He had though disregarded the commission with regard to the folk tunes, deciding to use his own thematic material instead. He called it *Mr Shilkret's Maggot* – at the time, *Mr Fortune's Maggot* was a popular novel. As feared, Shilkret rejected the piece on the basis that it was not what he had intended and described it as a short modernistic composition. Nor had it been based on English or American folk tunes. He offered another \$200 for the piece that he had originally asked for, but Holst declined.

Years later, Imogen Holst re-scored the work for small orchestra and called it *Capriccio*. It was first played in 1968. It is hardly jazz and certainly not a piece for a 1930s radio orchestra. Although Michael Short describes it as dull, I think that it has considerable appeal.

Although Holst had to abandon his Canadian tour, he was able to conduct two concerts of his own music. He sailed on the Europa from New York on 27th May. This turned out to be his last trip to the United States.

On return to the UK, he tried walking, but was unable to do the distances he had previously managed. However, by the following September, he was sufficiently recovered to do a 40-mile walk after the Three Choirs Festival.

Financially, he was now, at last, secure. As he said, "For the first time in my life, I have more money than I need".

Over Christmas 1932, Holst composed a Lyric movement for viola and orchestra, together with *The Brook Green Suite* for the junior orchestra at St Paul's Girls' School.

In April and May 1933, the ulcer which had stricken him in New York laid him low and he was unable to undertake engagements. However, in the August, he completed the first sketch of a scherzo to form part of his second orchestral symphony. His first (*The Cotswold Symphony*) had appeared way back in 1900. He was also able to orchestrate the movement. However, he was never able to start work on the other three movements. It turned out to be his final work.

The Scherzo has been arranged for organ (four hands) and will be performed at this year's Three Choirs Festival. The Holst Society are also recording it, together with four early organ voluntaries and all of Holst's Christmas music.

He was taken ill in the October. In December, he was admitted to a clinic. Whilst there, Vaughan Williams wrote and said that he had accepted Holst's advice and had removed the "nice tunes" from the last movement of his Fourth Symphony. Nice tunes? It would be interesting to know what the Fourth Symphony would have sounded like had Vaughan Williams not accepted Holst's advice.

Ill health prevented Holst from attending the first performance of *The Wandering Scholar* in January 1934. Worried about his health, Holst decided to resign from teaching at St Paul's Girls' School. However, the high mistress, a Miss Strudwick, would have none of it.

In February 1934, Elgar died. The following month, the composer Norman O'Neill was killed in a road accident.

Holst was advised that he had two choices, namely a major operation or to lead a restricted life as an invalid. He opted for the former. On 23rd May 1934, the duodenal ulcer was removed. The operation was declared a success. However, the operation had been a severe shock to his system. On 25th May, he died of heart failure. He was 59. He "passed away quietly and peacefully". After cremation, his ashes were buried at Chichester Cathedral. On 10th June, Delius died in France. Within five months, England had lost three of its finest composers.

So how would we assess Holst today? Clearly, the music Holst composed prior to 1918 was generally well received by the public. But for the last 15 years of his life, neither the public nor critics found Holst's music very appealing. In many respects, Holst was developing at a pace that the public could not keep up with. It didn't worry him that he was no longer popular – that meant he would not be pestered by photographers and autograph-hunters. 'At last, I'm free of them', he might have said. He was clearly ahead of his time. But isn't that the case with all contemporary composers? The problem today is that the public is largely unaware of Holst's later music. True, some of it is not immediately appealing. But, with perseverance, I am sure that the public will grow to appreciate and enjoy much of Holst's neglected music.