

Acknowledgements

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.

Harper Lee : *To Kill a Mockingbird*, chapter 3

How far back does one go? My earliest memory of George Butterworth is of buying a complete set of Cecil Sharp's *Country Dance Tunes* and *Morris Dance Tunes* in a second-hand bookshop in Petersfield, probably in 1966. I have them still, volumes IX and X of the second set are "arranged by Cecil Sharp and George Butterworth". I raided those books many times over the years for folk-tunes to use in my own juvenile compositions ; in fact my school's cadet force marched past on its General Inspection day one year to folk-tunes from the collection. Then, a year or two later, when rain had washed out a day's play in a test match, and Radio 3 (or was it the Third Programme?) broadcast music instead : I was spellbound by the fragile beauty of *The Banks of Green Willow*. I was 14 or 15 – how had I not known this before? I was at an age when every emotion is intensified – nothing could ever again be as beautiful as that moment, there and then. At university I got a score of the piece from the library and transcribed it for brass band (I was reading law, but spent more time writing and playing music, so I have some understanding of how George probably felt during his time at Oxford). Later in life my then partner – most patient of musicians – would accompany my dire attempts to sing some of the *Shropshire Lad* songs, and play under my baton in (rather better) performances of the orchestral works.

My admiration for Butterworth grew apace. I came to realise he was a masterful orchestrator who was developing a style from a combination of folk-song and the sound-worlds of Debussy and Grieg ; in fact he was largely self-taught in composition, just like another great love of mine, Elgar. It also became clear to me that success in performing his orchestral pieces lay in the degree to which performers viewed them primarily as chamber works – even the *Rhapsody : A Shropshire Lad*. This was quite a different path from the one his friend Vaughan Williams took ; indeed, one can even make a case that RVW learnt something from GSKB – for instance, the opening of *A Pastoral Symphony* seems to arise out of the *Shropshire Lad* rhapsody and the last of the Henley songs.

But I could never quite 'get' the prevalent view that Butterworth's music is nostalgic, existing forever in the shadow of his tragic death. How was this? He had no idea he would die in 1916. It is our own view of him that might be called nostalgic, not his ; our own dismay at the waste of life, not his ; and most importantly, our own anger at the apparent indifference of 'the authorities' in our own day, for which a young musician's death on the Somme is a poignant metaphor. So I decided to look at the person behind it all ; to try and understand something of his personality and motivations, seen if at all possible within the world he inhabited. It would not be a standard biography ; in any case, Michael Barlow and Anthony Murphy have written far better ones, and I cannot recommend them too highly : they are listed in the bibliography. Wayne Smith, too, has done a great service in making the *George Butterworth Memorial Volume* easily available for the first time. I have tried to acknowledge every use of their material in the body of this book. In particular I single out the work that Tony Murphy has done – and is still doing – in bringing to light the treasures of the various Butterworth archives ; I could not have written this book as it is without his original research, which has involved much travel throughout Britain, nor without his generosity in sharing it. Likewise, John Mitchell has been at the forefront of making available previously unknown music, piano arrangements of the

orchestral works, and some interesting research ; I am grateful too for his generosity. But in the end this is a personal 'take' on an artist who has captivated me for years and will not let go.

It's a little more than that, perhaps. One friend has suggested that, beyond any obvious Butterworth scholarship, this book might be a contribution to an appreciation of wider "aesthetics, reception history and cultural studies". Wow! I very much hope it is, and that it helps people to approach musical and historical research with a new awareness.

I should say something about footnotes, of which there is a profusion. I have a notable tendency to use 'footnotes' – asides – in my speech ; many of those in the list below will attest to this. So I chose to use them rather than end-notes to allow my thoughts to wander away into other topics that are not central to the tale. Further, much of the traditional-style biography is contained within them.¹

Many readers will know little about Butterworth's life so a brief synopsis follows immediately before the book begins in earnest. There is also a list of his known music, a list of illustrations with credits, and a bibliography at the end.

So this has been a labour of love for me, but it could never have been done without the help of many people who willingly gave it. I list them here in alphabetical order because I have no desire to make distinctions among generous friends who were under no obligation to assist in the first place :

Dr. Byron Adams, Dr. Tony Attwood, Dr Colin J. Bennett, Hugh M. Butterworth, Hugh Cobbe, Liane Curtis, Catherine Edmunds, Dr. Robert Evans, John Fawcett, Graham Jefcoate, Jill Gough, Anthony Halstead, Roger Hayman, Martin Holmes, Dr Anne James, Keith James, Graham Johnson, Nigel Kenyon, Dr. Hamish McRitchie, John Mitchell, Anthony Murphy, Anne Ozorio, Gustav Pilsel, Adrian Sheps, Nigel Simeone, Roderick Williams.

These institutions have also been of great help, especially as much research had of necessity to be done remotely :

The Bodleian Library, which houses most of the original Butterworth material ; the Durham County Archives ; the English Folk Dance and Song Society, whose Vaughan Williams Memorial Library is well worth visiting ; the Imperial War Museums ; Moss Bros plc, who probably received one of the stranger requests for the use of material ; the Rackley Library at Eton College ; the R.A.F Archives ; the Rebecca Clarke Society ; the Royal College of Music ; Rugby School ; Tonbridge School ; Winchester College.

If I were to make special mention of anybody, it would be of Keith James, who painted the wonderful cover portrait, and of Roger Hayman, who drew the map on p. 25, quite possibly having visited all the inns mentioned.

¹ Where else could I include the fact that *Butterworth* is an Old English (i.e., Anglo-Saxon) name consisting of the suffix *-worth*, an enclosure, and possibly *butere*, butter ; thus, an enclosure where butter is produced, a dairy? Or perhaps more likely the enclosure of an Anglo-Saxon with a name something like *Boter*? Whichever, it gave its name to a settlement that now lies beneath the town of Milnrow near Rochdale.

A note on layout

Not being a conventional biography, this book doesn't have a conventional layout. It is broadly in five parts :

Chapters II-IV cover folk-music and dance, including Butterworth's Diary of Morris Hunting, seen in the context of the world he knew ;

Chapters V-VII cover his development as a composer, with analyses of his surviving music ;

Chapter VIII considers the nature of memory, and introduces the idea of collective memories that we create in the present to make sense of the past ;

Chapters IX-XIII cover Butterworth's war service, including his annotated War Diary and letters ;

Chapters XIV-XVI consider what we can know of his personal life and friendships, as well as his personality, and speculate about what might have happened had he returned from France.

Interspersed among them are a number of Case Studies that examine specific questions in greater depth than is appropriate to the narrative. There are also two Interludes that might cleanse the palette a little before readers embark upon the stronger meat of the musical analyses and the War Diary.

A note on the musical analyses

If it is possible to write a meaningful book about a composer without ever referring to music, I certainly can't do it. Much of George Butterworth's is hardly well enough known not to need careful consideration. I have tried to avoid dryly 'academic' analyses and instead have concentrated on how Butterworth began to create a particular palette of effects that he clearly felt comfortable with. (Vaughan Williams did something similar, though he had so much more time to make something of it.) I have also tried not to become too 'technical', though doubt that I have avoided being so altogether. But I think that anyone with an ability to read music at amateur level, or to follow a hymn-tune, or even to appreciate the 'shape' of a piece of music, should not have too much difficulty following these analyses. I hope they enjoy doing so.

Chronological Notes

- Pre-1885 Alexander Kaye Butterworth (father), barrister-at-law, born at Deerhurst, Gloucs., descends from a long line of clergymen originally from Rochdale. His great-grandfather is Joseph Butterworth, founder of a law publishing house, M.P. for Dover and abolitionist friend of William Wilberforce. Julia Margaret (later Marguerite) Wigan (mother), born in Erith, Kent, descends from an Anglo-Indian family of administrators and physicians. She is a gifted singer whose family home is at Portishead, Bristol. They marry in 1884, Alexander being 29, Julia 34.
- 1885-1891 George born July 12th 1885 in Westbourne Square, Paddington (destroyed in WW2). Given the names George Sainton – the first a Butterworth family name, the second from the French *émigré* violinist and composer Prosper Sainton, whose wife Charlotte was a singer, teacher and friend of Julia, who had died a few months before George's birth.
- 1891-1896 Alexander appointed Solicitor to the North East Railway ; the family moves to York, where they live in Driffield Terrace. George is educated at home by tutors, but also begins piano and dancing lessons, in the process meeting fellow-pupil Reginald (R. O.) Morris, who becomes a lifelong friend.
- 1896-1899 Home-schooling ends, and George enrolls at Aysgarth School near Bedale, N. Yorkshire. He has difficulty settling into his first experience of the regular company of other children ; in particular, shyness and a lack of enthusiasm are noted. Things improve from the next year, until in his final year he is Head Boy. Kindness towards other pupils is apparent, as are his cricketing skills. Begins to compose, sending home hymn tunes.
- 1899-1904 Although destined for Marlborough (his father's and uncle's school) he wins a scholarship to Eton College, becoming one of the 70 King's Scholars. Eventually he becomes one of the Sixth Form Select (the top ten pupils), captain of the College XI at cricket, and is elected to the student body POP. Gains the attention of the Assistant Music Master, Thomas F. Dunhill, and performs in school concerts as an accompanist, in chamber works, and sometimes as a soloist. Conducts his orchestral *Barcarolle* at Eton, and writes a string quartet and a violin sonata.
- 1904-1908 Enters Trinity College, Oxford, to read Greats. Introduced by Francis Jekyll to folk-song, Lucy Broadwood, and the poetry of A. E. Housman ; agrees with him to set a poem in competition with Somervell's Housman cycle. Joins the English Folk-Song Society and begins to collect folk-songs with Jekyll. In his second year is elected President of the University Musical Society. Meets Hugh Allen, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Cecil J. Sharp while at Oxford and becomes friendly with them all. Performs regularly, often accompanying violinist Ferdinand Speyer ; through this activity meets Reginald Lennard and Adrian Boult. Sings with the Oxford Bach Society. In 1906 Alexander Butterworth becomes General Manager of the N.E.R. ; by 1908 his relationship with his son has become strained, particularly after

George makes it clear he will not pursue a legal career. Graduates with a 3rd-class degree.

- 1908-1910 Employed by *The Times* as an assistant music critic under J. A. Fuller-Maitland, part of a trio whose third member is H. C. Colles. Takes private lessons in piano with Leonard Borwick, and composition with Charles Wood. Composes the song *I fear thy kisses* (1909). In the Summer applies for a post as assistant music master at Radley College. During this time, whilst living at The Lodge, writes the *Folk-Songs from Sussex*, and several of the Housman settings. Sings in performances of Bach's *B minor Mass* at Leeds and Cambridge, meeting J. Campbell McInnes and Edward J. Dent. Performs at an old-Etonians concert, playing his *Rhapsody on English Folk-Tunes* for two pianos with Edward Speyer, a piano duo with Frederick S. Kelly, and accompanying Ferdinand Speyer. Cricketing skills admired at Radley, but leaves in Summer 1910. Attends the first performance at Leeds of Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony*. Moves back to London to live with his parents – themselves transferred from York because his mother has cancer. Enters the Royal College of Music to study primarily organ and piano. Begins the *English Idyll No. 1*. Enrols for an Oxford B.Mus. and (perhaps) writes the *Suite for String Quartet(t)e*.
- 1911 At midnight on New Year's Eve, Butterworth is making a fair copy of the Housman song *Loveliest of trees*. Julia Kaye Butterworth dies on January 20th, aged 61 ; her son writes the song *Requiescat*. He does not attend the RCM for almost the whole Spring term. Most of the Housman songs are performed in Oxford on May 16th, by Campbell McInnes, the composer at the piano. Victor A. Barrington-Kennett begins staying regularly at the Butterworth home while he is working in London. George remodels the Housman songs into two separate sets, dedicating the first to 'V.A.B.-K.' *Six Songs from A Shropshire Lad* being performed in London by McInnes and Hamilton Harty on June 20th. He writes the *English Idyll No. 2* as well as *The Land of Lost Content* – the first version of *A "Shropshire Lad" Rhapsody*. He composes the final Housman song, *On the idle hill of summer*, and begins the Henley cycle *Love Blows as the Wind Blows* for voice and string quartet ; he also takes part in the Stratford Folk-Dance Summer School. Alexander Kaye Butterworth is the employers' lead negotiator during the national railway strike in the Autumn. George leaves the RCM in November, having been absent for much of the year. The English Folk-Dance Society is formed in December ; Butterworth joins and is instantly immersed in the world of dance. During song collecting in Norfolk with Vaughan Williams, both are rowed around in circles by a drunken singer.
- 1912 Butterworth plays a role during Vaughan Williams's composing of *A London Symphony*, regularly discussing and criticizing the sketches. *Two English Idylls* performed in Oxford in February, conducted by Hugh Allen. George writes *English Idyll No. 3* probably during this year, and completes *Love Blows as the Wind Blows*. He spends 10 days around Bicester hunting Morris dances, and writes volumes 3 & 4 of *The Morris Book* with Cecil Sharp. Dancing demonstrations with the

EFDS men's side become a regular weekend commitment. He is 'filmed' dancing, using a Kinora 'what the butler saw' machine. *The Land of Lost Content* is selected for the 1913 Leeds Festival ; George pays for a new copy of the score to be made, renaming it *The Cherry Tree*. He continues to collect songs and dances, and is involved with the formation of the Palestrina Society, inviting Vaughan Williams to conduct. He takes part in the EFDS Stratford Summer School and Morris dance demonstrations at the Savoy Theatre during Granville Barker's controversial production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

1913 George's last-known song-collecting trip is in March, to Norfolk. He takes part in the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. A third version of *The Land of Lost Content/The Cherry Tree* is made, the title being changed yet again to *A "Shropshire Lad" Rhapsody*. He travels to Brussels and Paris in June with the EFDS demonstration team, followed by the Stratford Summer school. *A "Shropshire Lad" Rhapsody* is performed on October 2nd at the Leeds Festival, conducted by Arthur Nikisch. George revises and rescues *English Idyll No. 3* as *The Banks of Green Willow*. In December, Vaughan Williams travels abroad ; at some point Butterworth, Francis Toye, and Bevis Ellis "revise" the score of *A London Symphony* in his absence, oversee the production of band parts, and make a short score prior to its first performance.

1914 In late 1913 or early 1914, Butterworth moves to Colville Gardens, Bayswater. First performances of *The Banks of Green Willow*, by Boulton at West Kirby (February 27th) and by Butterworth himself in Oxford (February 28th). First London performances of *A "Shropshire Lad" Rhapsody* and *The Banks of Green Willow* (March 20th) conducted by Geoffrey Toye who also gives the first performance of RVW's *A London Symphony* (March 27th). Butterworth extensively revises *Love Blows as the Wind Blows*, and begins an orchestral *Fantasia*. He attends Stratford Summer school, during which war is declared.² Tries but fails to get a commission through the Oxford O.T.C., turns down a private offer of help to get one, asks for news of any civilian posts, and then volunteers as a private in the D.C.L.I. as one of a group of eight friends, including Morris, Ellis and G. Toye. He undergoes training and transfers with five of the friends to the 68th Brigade, George becoming a 2nd Lieutenant in the 13th Battalion, D.L.I.

1915-1916 Is best man at R. O. Morris's wedding in January 1915 to Vaughan Williams's sister-in-law. Embarks for France on August 26th. The 68th Brigade held in reserve during battle of Loos, but Butterworth leads a night rescue mission in No-Man's Land. Moves to the Calonne sector and is on fringe of a German assault to drive British off Vimy Ridge.

² I have failed to find any connexion between these events.

His father is knighted and marries Dorothea ('Dolly') Ionides ; George attends the wedding. He moves to Picardy for the Somme assault, but is held in reserve for the opening days, going into action at Bailiff Wood near Contalmaison on July 7th. His name is "put forward for his good work" during this period. He supervises the reorganisation of the line under fire during an intense period near Pozières from 17th-19th, and takes command of 'A' Company when his Captain is wounded. (He is awarded the Military Cross for these actions, but never receives it.) He supervises the digging of a new trench, just 200 metres from the German line, which is called "Butterworth Trench" on official maps ; he is wounded by shrapnel during this. He takes part in an attack along Munster Alley on the night of August 4th-5th. His part of the attack is successful, but he is killed by a sniper at 4.45 a.m. on August 5th. According to his Brigade commander, he does enough to win the M.C. again, though it cannot be awarded posthumously. George is hastily buried near where he fell but his remains cannot be identified after the war, and his name is on the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme at Thiepval (below).

