



*The Association of English Singers & Speakers*

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*Graham Johnson OBE Dame Cleo Laine Niven Miller*

*Patricia Routledge CBE Professor Robert Saxton*

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*www.aofess.org.uk*

## **NEWSLETTER JULY 2011**

### **A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN**

Although only the summer of 2011, the AESS committee is looking ahead to the Centenary in 2013. A sub-committee is working on producing the last three volumes of 'A Century of English Song', and members have offered their services for masterclasses or for concerts of English Song and poetry as soloists or with choirs. All is in its early stage and we welcome any ideas or offers of help. It would be good to use the Centenary to significantly increase our membership and to have as many events away from London as possible to highlight the ever increasing regional scope of the Association. The final of the Catherine Lambert Competition will be held in Lincoln Minster School in November and it will be interesting to see what effect that has on the number and whereabouts of the entrants.

We experienced a marvellous evening at the 'premiere' of the Catherine Lambert DVD at the Royal College of Music. The hall was packed with many colleagues, friends, former students and AESS members, including Patricia Routledge, one of our Presidents, to watch Catherine in conversation with Janis Kelly and Norbert Meyn. Janis and Norbert had arranged a superb evening with entertainment from many RCM professors and past and present students and Catherine was on great form.

The AGM and Annual Dinner was another enjoyable occasion with over forty members and guests attending the Dinner, which was preceded by a superb 'entertainment' devised and performed, as last year, by three members: Rosamund Shelley, Marian Lines and Marilyn Cutts. The guest speaker, who spoke most entertainingly, was the Reverend Prebendary William Scott, Sub-Dean of Her Majesty's Chapel Royal at St. James's Palace.

The Courtney Kenny and Patricia Routledge Competitions both produced excellent winners, strong on all aspects of performance. They both ‘inhabited’ their chosen themed programmes with great assurance as well as having fine voices.

The Association needs to be active in masterclasses, workshops and concerts in addition to competitions. A tribute to Michael Head is at the planning stage. Please remember that you can advertise any concert of your own to other members via our group email and give the concert under the auspices of the AESS by adding our logo. I wish you all a very enjoyable summer.

### **THE 2011 AESS & PATRICIA ROUTLEDGE ENGLISH SONG COMPETITION**

The Final of the 2011 Association of English Speakers and Singers Patricia Routledge National English Song Competition took place this evening at Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

We are grateful to Miss Routledge for continuing to fund this important competition which is pivotal in the furtherance of the association's aim of promoting the performance of both speech and song in the English language to the highest standard.

We are grateful to this evening's distinguished panel of judges; Eiddwen HARRY, Richard Suart and David Williams and to the Trinity Laban administration, vocal faculty and staff for their assistance and use of the college facilities.

From a strong group of finalists the prizes were awarded as follows:

First Prize of £2,000	- Samuel Evans RCM
Second Prize of £1,000	- Catherine Backhouse GSMD
Third Prize of £1,000	- Ben McAteer GSMD
Pianists Prize of £1,000	- Jamie Thompson RNCM

Many congratulations to them.

### **An Appreciation of the Prizewinners**

**Samuel Evans** (Baritone) – First Prize

Sam has great presence and made an immediate and sustained connection with us from his clear but casual introduction through an admirable programme. His full voice is exciting and sometimes heartrending and used throughout with lightness and flexibility notably in ‘Lads in their hundreds’. Both poems were finely and naturally spoken – in Ozymandias he balanced subtlety with irony to great effect.

### 3

#### **Catherine Backhouse** (Mezzo-soprano) – Second Prize

Catherine's energetic introduction set the mood with an unexpected burst of verse. She grabbed our attention and never let it go till the end of the programme. She has a big voice and personality and 'stays in the moment' with an obvious understanding of her material – 'Where Corals Lie' was beautifully shaped. Both poems were feelingly spoken, in particular Eliot's 'Death by Water'. 'Good Ale' was a show-stopping finale.

#### **Ben McAteer** (Baritone) – Third Prize

Ben explained the concept of his programme entirely of Quilter with confidence, and it was soon clear how well that composer's songs suited his expressive and sonorously produced baritone. Diction was very good and he reflected the colour and mood of the music wonderfully well. His verse selection was crisply articulated, and though well spoken he was a little less at home here.

We thank everybody who took part in both the final and the preliminary rounds as well as the coordinator Stephen Miles.

Please visit the AESS website for future updates on the three competitions supported by the association and for listings of events as well as the regular newsletters at <http://www.aofess.org.uk>

Tell a friend about the AESS and encourage them to join so that they can help support the future generations of English speaking singers and speakers...

### **OBITUARY**

It is with very great sadness that the AESS has learned of the death of the singer **Robert Tear**. Please find the link below to the obituary in the Daily Telegraph.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/music-obituaries/8414441/Robert-Tear.html>

### **FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY**

It is now three months since 2011/12 membership subscriptions became due and as Membership Secretary I must thank everyone who paid on time making it the best year ever for prompt payment.

Sadly, as reminders are sent out there are a few people each year who do not renew their membership - often for very good reasons - retirement , ill-health or financial strictures. There are also one or two who ask "Well, what does AESS do for me?"

#### 4

I used to ask this myself. I hardly ever managed to get to meetings and so I didn't feel very involved. Then upon receiving a "final demand" from our illustrious chairman, I decided I ought make up my mind. Either I must be proactive and see what it led to or I must hand in my notice.

I decided to offer my services on the committee. This meant I would have to find the time to attend at least the committee meetings and some of the events - and what a joy it has turned out to be.

AESS, I found, had many of my contemporaries from college and a scattering of professors among its members so old friendships were renewed and new ones were forged, and with such interesting people. The masterclasses and workshops proved to be stimulating, not least when Rhiddian Roberts of "X Factor" fame appeared singing Finzi (superbly!) for Graham Johnson. The Annual dinner usually has an amusing speaker or great entertainment or both.

Our three competitions have proved an ideal place to hear different repertoire and new singers. On several occasions (and I hope there will be more) I have been able to find soloists for my choir concerts through AESS.

The chance to take part in AESS events has also proved fruitful, leading to new partnerships and introductions to new repertoire. I am sure many members thoroughly enjoyed the concert of Betty Roe's music - such variety and such fun! The Armstrong Gibbs Celebration was also an eye-opener to the work of an unjustly neglected composer.

AESS undertakes not to give out members' contact details but it can be a useful conduit for making contact. This happened for me when I needed a copy of a particularly obscure song and I was put in touch with a member who could provide it. There are also instances where colleagues have lost touch and we can help them to reopen communication.

The introduction of the Newsletter and email circulation of notices is another bonus. Members can publicise their performances and hear news of other fellow singers and speakers.

All this - for only £20 a year! Surely it is a bargain at the price?

**Patricia Williams**

## TEXTUAL PROBLEMS IN THE SONGS OF IVOR GURNEY

The situation is well described by Marion M. Scott in the Preface to OUP's *Ivor Gurney, A First Volume of Ten Songs*. 'Gurney himself wrote swiftly when putting his ideas on paper and was not at all careful or consistent about phrasing or expression marks, except occasionally, when preparing a work for publication. He also had a habit, each time he re-copied a song, of making alterations or permutations, some small, some rather considerable, in the music. ... Similar mental processes were at work in him over the words he used. When he meant to set a poem, he like to carry it about with him, either copied into his pocket notebook or else absorbed direct into his memory. When the work of the actual setting came along, he depended almost entirely on memory. As a result he did not always reproduce each word with literal exactness, though the main contents of the line remained secure and true to the poet's intentions. To prepare these songs for publication therefore involved some problems, and Ivor Gurney was already too ill to grapple with them himself. ... Finally the words were checked through with the poets' own versions and wherever Gurney's words differed from theirs the latter have been added in small type below the main line of the poetry. This seemed the best way of being faithful both to the poets and — (what we were very anxious to achieve) — to the composer's own text.'

This procedure is fine so far as printed scores are concerned, and has been followed by subsequent editors. (This is not the case with the 'Elizas' or 'Lights Out', which have not been given new editions.). However, it does not solve the question of what is the best way to perform the songs. Simply singing Gurney's words in all cases is not 'being faithful to the poets'! The verbal variants can be divided into three classes. Memory slips that can be easily corrected; memory slips where the original words do not fit the music, and deliberate changes by Gurney. (It is worth noting that in the setting of Belloc's poem 'A West Sussex Drinking Song' the first edition has the following note: 'The words ... have, with the Author's consent, been slightly altered for musical purposes.'). In the first case it is surely only fair to the poet to restore the original words. In the second it will depend on whether the change has actually damaged the poem, and if so whether it is possible to repair it. This is particularly important with 'On the Downs' and 'The trumpet, from 'Lights Out'. In the third case Gurney's words should obviously be retained. Unfortunately it is not always easy to decide to which of these classes a particular case belongs. (The following are a few examples)

### OUP Bk1

#### All night under the moon

Page 16, bar 3: 'calling and crying', Gurney; 'flying and crying', Gibson. Gurney's version has nice alliteration, but Gibson ties this 'flying' in with the same word on page 17, last bar; it seems better to keep to Gibson in this case. Page 17, bar 9: Gurney has 'dreaming' for Gibson's 'silvery'; 'silvery' fits the triplet perfectly, so is perhaps preferable here. Page 18, bar 4: 'Wandering voices', Gurney; 'Rapturous voices', Gibson. There seems no good reason for altering Gibson's word, which can be easily fitted to the music.

## 6

### **When Death to either shall come**

Page 27 bar 2: Gurney's 'If' for Yeats's 'When' is clearly a major error, though there is at least one recording which keeps 'If' in spite of it being obvious nonsense. Faithfulness to the composer can be carried too far! Page 28: there are three variants here: bar 4: Gurney has 'souls' for 'heart'; bar 7: he has 'and' for 'or'; bar 9: 'I have' for 'That I'. None of the changes seem important, and bearing in mind the major error in bar 2 they may all be a matter of faulty memory. Probably better to use Yeats throughout.

### **OUP Bk2**

#### **Last Hours**

Page 25, bars 5-6: Gurney's 'clouds that pass' rather than Freeman's 'clouds of gray' destroys the rhyme with 'all day' at the end of the verse. This should be corrected. It may be that Gurney wished to remove the repetition of the word 'gray', which comes again on page 26, bar 13, but this would surely be an error; the repetition of words is part of the poet's description of his sad mood – the next line has 'Grass, trees, grass again', for example – and many other words are repeated during the course of the poem. Page 25 bars 8-9: Gurney changes 'falls' to 'hangs', better for singing in itself, though the vowel matching of 'falls all day' is lost. Either word can be justified in performance.

### **OUP Bk4**

#### **Brown is my Love**

Page 4, bar 2: Gurney changes 'but graceful' to 'and graceful'. This makes superficial sense, but misses the point of the next lines – 'brown' is being contrasted with the more highly rated 'white', so 'my love' is 'graceful' in spite of being brown. Bar 7: 'his whiteness', Gurney for 'its brightness', poet. This also needs correcting; 'whiteness' comes from bar 4, and is the subject referred to by 'its'

#### **On the Downs**

This magnificent song raises many difficulties, most of which do a great disservice to the poet. Page 16, bar 4: 'kestrel hovers', Gurney; 'kestrels hover', Masfield. What seems a slight and unimportant memory slip in fact causes two problems – Gurney loses the rhyme with 'cover' in bar 8, and in the same bar 'their shadows' refers back to 'kestrels', not one kestrel (see also page 18, bar 4). Bar 11: Gurney's 'drift' for Masfield's 'gorse' comes from the next bar – keep 'gorse'. Page 17, bar 1: Gurney has left out two words here. These 'with fire' are not essential to the sense, which is presumably why the editors did not try to include them. However, Masfield's poem has a regular pattern of a five stress line followed by a two stressed one; this is one of the long lines, and Gurney has removed one of the stresses. If the singer feels this loss is important the words can easily be replaced by changing the minim of 'hangs' to dotted quaver semiquaver crotchet. Bars 4-5: 'the downs,', Gurney; 'these downs' Masfield. Here Gurney has missed the point, treating the second 'on the downs' as a simple repetition. Masfield's 'these' is one of the stress words of the line, and is making the point that he is not talking about any downs, but that on these downs in particular the tribe burnt men in the frame – there should not be a comma after 'downs' in bar 5. Making the last two notes in bar 4 a quaver for 'on' and use the first two quavers in bar 5 for 'these downs' would solve the problem simply.

7

Bar 8: Gurney's 'burning' has come from bar 5 of this page – keep Masfield's 'turning'. Page 18, bar 4: 'hawkes' – the 'e' is simply a printing error, but note there are again several hawks, not one, as in the first line of the poem.

The music of this song suggests that Gurney was too excited to check the details of the words. Though Gurney and Harvey believed Masfield was pleased with the setting (*Ivor Gurney and Marion Scott*, Pamela Blevins, page 183) it was surely the enthusiasm of the music that he responded to, perhaps failing to notice the errors in the words. Correcting these errors, almost certainly due to faulty memory, could make a fine song into a great one.

### **A Cradle Song**

All the words in small print can be ignored. Gurney set the original version of the poem, with no errors, while the editors have used the later revised version.

**NB:** *This is a selection first published in the Ivor Gurney Society Journal Vol. 15 p 67-80 in 2009. Kind permission to reprint was given by RKR Thornton. We hope to include further instalments of the article in future issues of the AESS Newsletter. The complete article can be obtained, price £5 from the Ivor Gurney Society.*

### **CATHERINE LAMBERT at the Royal College of Music**

*(A view from the audience)*

Listening to the wonderful, and ageless, Catherine Lambert at the Royal College of Music in March this year, I realized what a debt singers, and opera in particular, owed to her visionary teaching methods and example.

This was borne in on me as I clearly remember the stilted, static touring opera company productions of my youth, when singers stood square on (soloists) or in straight lines (ensembles and chorus) and held forth – loudly; the result was dramatically null and dull.

For years after that I listened to opera on disc or radio rather than pay high prices in an opera house. Then I saw a performance of Werther at the ROH and was stunned by the transformation: acting, characterization, movement, setting – all were gripping, and I realized that a revolution had taken place. So hearing Catherine's interview on DVD and her Q & A session afterwards made me realize what advances she, and others like her, had introduced into the world of singing and opera production.

Of course, the hallmark of a great teacher was very clear to us as we listened to Catherine that evening – personality: the ability to communicate directly to the individual or the audience, the ability to entrance. We were entranced.

**ML**

## 8

### THE JOYS OF DESIGNING - The 3<sup>rd</sup> String (*An occasional series*)

In 1948 I went to see the film of HAMLET and fell in love – not so much with Laurence Olivier (Hamlet wasn't quite as devastating to a 14-year-old as Maxim de Winter in Rebecca) but with the wonderful Renaissance-ish clothes designed for the film by Roger Furse. From then on I copied them endlessly and added my own flourishes.

Noticing my enthusiasm, Miss Calvey, an inspirational art teacher, steered me towards costume design, lent me illustrated books of historical dress and period fashion plates and entered me for the costume design paper (among others) for Art O Level.

Later, at The Guildhall I studied acting (with singing), teaching method and stage design - the 3 Strings of my time at John Carpenter St. There I started making costumes, mostly for myself (I recall a figure-hugging, acid-green and turquoise draped confection for Delilah in Samson Agonistes), and illustrated my production essays with copious costume and set designs. I also made up my mind that if I couldn't be an actress I must become a costume designer, but that I would never, never use the teaching qualification I also graduated with.

As it turned out (like the Captain of The Pinafore), one should never say never and in due time the 1<sup>st</sup> String (acting) snapped and I became a teacher (the 2<sup>nd</sup> String) of general subjects plus drama and music all scrambled together. Of course the acting became part of the teaching - but it was the drama which ensured that the 3<sup>rd</sup> String, (costume design) was vigorously played.

During over twenty years in my 'never' profession we created (first with music by Rosalind Rowland, then Betty Roe) numerous musical plays, concerts and entertainments with children / staff / parents all part of the collaborative mix: costumes and stage design being one of the most enjoyable elements for me. From way back in the 60s I can still visualize my first class presentation - 30 Infants, rustling loudly with every step, all resplendent in pink and yellow crepe paper costumes held together with staples (would Health & Safety possibly have passed that today?).

Having played a final jig on the 2<sup>nd</sup> String at 60, I progressed, in retirement, to regularly directing adults (Oh, Joy!) for a fine local am/dram society - everything from pantomime, via Shakespeare to Elliot and Wilde. I didn't make costumes here (just props), but worked with a co-member who was a wiz at cutting and inventing costumes for almost anything when I provided drawings - boots, periwigs, armour, crinolines – it was, and is, the most fun I've ever had.

Though I've never made a penny out of costume or prop design, if you asked me tomorrow for Cleopatra's robes or John the Baptist's head, I'd be in 7<sup>th</sup> heaven - playing that 3<sup>rd</sup> String like mad!

**Marian Lines**

