



Yorkshire & North East Branch Newsletter No 19 - September 2020

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Branch Chairman's message



We are living in interesting times. Unfortunately lock-down continues and the prospect of real meetings 'in the flesh' seems somewhat distant. Nevertheless, the Yorkshire & North East Branch is doing all it can to maintain an active programme.

We can take a degree of satisfaction from being the first branch to hold on-line meetings. As members will recall, the first two were held at the exact times as advertised in our published programmes: 23 May, 2 pm, and 27 June, 2 pm. Continuing in this way was something the committee felt very strongly about.

David Young, Caroline Gilderdale and Paul Grafton at the Royal Hall, Harrogate.

As the time approached for the first on-line event our nervousness increased. None of us could claim any expertise in on-line technology, we were due to be joined by members of the national executive who were keenly interested in the results, and we became increasingly conscious of the prospect of embarrassing failure. In short, it appeared that all eyes and ears were on us.

Fortification came from two quarters. Firstly, our speaker Christopher Wiltshire, who coped with the technology remarkably well, showed patience and good humour throughout, and gave a thoroughly absorbing presentation entitled 'Elgar as Remembered in Radio Interview by Those who Knew Him'. Secondly, we were singularly fortunate to have the technical assistance and support of Anne-Marie Grafton, who guided us during the two trial runs and presentation.

Our June on-line talk was by the Vice-Chairman of the Elgar Society, Stuart Freed, who gave a technically adroit and highly enjoyable presentation on 'The Lighter Side of Elgar'. Stuart is organizing a national on-line programme, the first of which has already been given, and members will have received information about future such events.

Our own virtual programme provides much to look forward to. On 31 October, in a change to the advertised programme, Peter Newble will speak on 'Judas in the Apostles'; this is a pre-recorded presentation which will be followed by a live question and answer session. Next, on 28 November, we have our very own Professor Bernard Porter on 'Elgar, the North, and King Olaf', which will be delivered, appropriately enough, from Sweden. More details of these events nearer the time.

And next year? Let us hope for less interesting times!

David Young - Branch Chairman

Mrs Elgar? — Settle's missed opportunity

The quiet market town of Settle in the Yorkshire Dales is known as the home of Elgar's good friend, Dr Charles William Buck. However it is also the birthplace of another respectable lady who attracted the romantic attentions and another failed proposal from Edward Elgar. Who was she and what do we know about Sarah Annie Wilkinson-Newsholme?

This account is part of the Settle Graveyard Project which has been researching the lives of those buried in the graveyard of the Parish Church. The project has provided a wonderful alternative history of the area and has been well publicised in a book, on a website and by Facebook. As a result numerous descendants have come forward to share knowledge, including a descendant from this family, Paul Wiltshire. His family records have provided photos and a unique insight into the life of the Wilkinson-Newsholmes.

The Wilkinson family ancestry can be traced back to Newbiggin in Bishopsdale, near Aysgarth, in the reign of Charles I. They were wealthy and successful landowners. 'Wilkinson-Newsholme' was adopted at the birth of George in 1791, the son of George Wilkinson, a 52 year old bachelor and his servant, 19 year old Bridget Newsholme. George (Snr) died at the time of little George's birth but he left a healthy legacy for his son's upbringing, education, apprenticeship and business set up costs. George (Jnr) married, had five children and became a successful cabinet maker in Settle. The Wilkinson-Newsholmes were neighbours to the Buck family.

In the next generation, eldest son John Wilkinson-Newsholme, born in 1824, had married Agnes Bateson in May 1849 just three months before both her parents died of typhoid. Agnes and John helped to bring up some of her eight younger siblings as well as ten children of their own, including a pair of their own. Sarah Annie, born in 1851, was their eldest child.



In 1860 John inherited a considerable amount of land from a 78 year old cousin William Wilkinson who was also his brother-in-law, having married John's younger sister Mary. They lived at the impressive Hellifield Green which still stands today. A wonderful family photo shows John Wilkinson-Newsholme *'standing alone beside a pile of hay, a rake grasped firmly in his hands, posing as the monarch of all he surveys'*. In the late 1870s another photo shows John on the steps of Hellifield Green with Sarah Annie to his left. Daughter Mary, wife Agnes, daughter Maria and son Henry pose with a tennis racket. This in itself is remarkable as the commercial production of the tennis net had only begun in 1874.

In 1884 Elgar's fiancée Helen Jessie Weaver from Worcester broke off her engagement to him, citing religious differences, leaving a completely broken hearted man. Elgar's success in marital proposals during the 1880s was poor. Being a Catholic and a penniless musician were not attractive attributes for some. Many a respectable lady may later have rued the day they (or their father's) made decisions in this regard, especially if they remained a spinster. Sarah Annie Wilkinson Newsholme may have been one such woman.



Through his friendship with Dr Buck, Elgar met the Wilkinson-Newsholmes. During 1885 they spent many an afternoon playing tennis, drinking tea and playing the piano at Hellifield Green as the steam trains rumbled by on the Leeds to Lancaster line. Apparently Edward was referred to as 'Uncle Elgar' by the younger siblings. Elgar's courtship of Sarah Annie, six years his senior, evolved and was captured in a photo of the family drinking tea in the grounds of Hellifield Green. The Wiltshire family still retains the original photo. In 1984, the *Times* published the section showing Elgar and Sarah standing behind her father.



Reports vary, but some suggest Elgar asked for John's permission to marry Sarah Annie but was dismissed using words to the effect of '*I will not allow one of my daughters to marry a penniless musician*'. Whether or not this actually happened we will never know but a year later Elgar met Caroline Alice Roberts, almost 10 years his senior, who became his wife in 1889.

What happened to Sarah Annie? Known as 'Miss Wilks', Sarah Annie worked as an incredibly efficient book keeper for the only department store in Settle, 'Tathams'. She looked after aged aunt Mary and then in 1917, aged 66, married 75 year old Frederick George Sykes, a retired cotton trader.

Sarah Annie's father, John, died in 1894 at the age of 70. Her siblings had fascinating lives. Her brother George Thomas became a successful pharmacist in Sheffield. He was a Justice of the Peace for the City of Sheffield and President of the Pharmaceutical Society in 1890 and 1901. George Thomas's daughter Ethel put her own stamp on their family history by marrying Billy Mylan who was not only mixed race, Anglo Indian, but also Catholic. Billy's father would not speak to him after the marriage as he had married outside the Catholic faith.



Brothers William, Robert and John became international iron merchants. Brother John married Emily Maud Mary Duckett whose father, Edward, had made his fortune in the Australian Gold Rush. Edward Duckett was the son of Charles Duckett who ran the King William beerhouse, also in Settle. Sister Mary remained a spinster and lived most of her life with sister Maria who had married a curate, Henry Massiah, whose father was born in the West Indies. Their wedding was a grand affair, again demonstrating the latest fashions in ladies' millinery.

After Maria died in 1919, Mary spent the remaining 26 years of her life living with Henry Massiah. Sarah Annie's youngest brother Joseph also became a vicar and served in Long Preston, close to Hellifield.

Unfortunately he was defrocked after being found guilty of offences with a choir boy, but that's definitely a story for another occasion.



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with thanks to the Wiltshire family