

# A HOLST BAND MANUSCRIPT DISCOVERED

by Michael Short

*A previously unknown manuscript of Gustav Holst's Suite No. 1 for wind band has recently come to light, forming part of a private legacy.*

The manuscript is a piano reduction of the Suite, mostly in the hand of a copyist, but with indications of instrumentation and some cue passages and other phrases in Holst's own hand. It consists of twenty-eight 12-stave pages, quarto size (30 x 24.5 cm), each containing four two-stave systems, with a title-page and blank back page on which there are some faint pencil sketches (not in Holst's hand). The composer's name on the title-page is given as 'Gustav von Holst', indicating that it is earlier than 1918 (when he dropped the 'von' from his name), and although most of the title-page is the work of a copyist, Holst himself has written his address in pencil in the bottom right-hand corner as '10 The Terrace, Barnes'. This beautiful Georgian house overlooking the River Thames was the composer's home from 1908 to 1913, and the dating of the score is further narrowed down by the fact that the title is given as *Military Band Suite in Eb*, to which Holst himself has later inserted the word '1st' before 'Suite', indicating that the manuscript had been written before the *Second Suite* was composed in 1911. As Holst entered the *First Suite* under the date 1909 in the notebook in which he listed his compositions as he wrote them, it seems that this score must have been completed between 1909 and 1911, and could well be the original piano reduction.

At first glance, the musical notation bears a strong resemblance to Holst's own writing, but with the notes much larger than he would have made them. This is confused slightly by the fact that some additional clefs are definitely in Holst's hand, but in general most of the clefs and key-signatures have been written by someone else. Imogen Holst said that during Holst's early career his wife Isobel had helped him prepare his scores, but so little of her musical handwriting survives as to make certain identification impossible. Moreover, at this particular time she would doubtless have been too busy coping with the demands of the infant Imogen to be able to assist in this way. As the large size of the notes and the elaborate twirls of many of the bass clefs suggest a rather immature copyist, the work may have been done by one of Holst's young pupils at St Paul's or James Allen's Girls' Schools.

The music itself is virtually identical to the piano reduction given at the bottom of the autograph full score in the British Library (Add Mss 47824), and it therefore seems likely that Holst asked an assistant to copy this as a separate score, to which he then added details of instrumentation and some cues. So there are no musical surprises here, but it would be interesting to know why this copy of the reduction was made. Jon Mitchell has suggested that Holst wrote the Suite for the competition organised in 1909 by the Worshipful Company of Musicians, in which case the reduction would have been needed to comply with the regulations of the competition. In the event, the first prize was won by Percy Fletcher for his *Woodland Sketches*, and as Holst's name does not appear in the list of runners-up, there is no proof that he did in fact submit the Suite. If indeed he did, the judges seem to have made a grievous error in rejecting this finely-constructed work which has since become a classic of the band repertoire.

The piano score bears rehearsal marks in blue pencil, and so

has obviously been used for performance, and in view of its provenance from the Birmingham area it is likely that it was in the possession of Appleby Matthews, who conducted three performances with the Birmingham City Police Band in November 1920, some time before the work appeared in print. A performance at the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, on 23 June 1920 was described in the programme as 'first performance', but this is unlikely as Imogen Holst recalled talking to elderly bandsmen who remembered performing the Suite around the time of the First World War. In the archives of the Holst Foundation at Aldeburgh there is a manuscript first cornet part in a copyist's hand, with indications of instrumentation, showing that it was probably used as a conductor's guide. On the front cover of this part the composer's name is given as 'Gustav von Holst', but the 'von' has subsequently been crossed out, so as Holst discarded the 'von' in 1918, it seems that the Suite was performed before that date, and could well have been the suite performed at Newcastle in 1917 which is mentioned in Holst's letters.

But the mystery remains as to why the Suite was written in the first place. Perhaps one day we will know the answer, but meanwhile this recently-discovered manuscript piano reduction is to be placed for safe keeping in the British Library, where it will be available for study alongside Holst's autograph full score.

The image shows a page of musical notation from a manuscript piano reduction. It consists of four systems of two staves each. The notation is a piano reduction of a piece for wind band. The upper staves contain the melodic lines, and the lower staves contain the harmonic accompaniment. The notes are written in a large, somewhat irregular hand, characteristic of a copyist. There are several annotations in blue pencil, including 'clar' (clarinet), 'oboe', 'trumpet', 'trombone', 'saxophone', 'RH' (right hand), and 'morendo'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, and dynamic markings.

*A page of the manuscript piano reduction of Holst's Suite No. 1 in Eb, showing the copyist's larger notes, with smaller notes in the upper stave and instrumentation in the composer's own hand*