

THE HUNDRED PARISHES SOCIETY

www.hundredparishes.org.uk

One of the features of The Hundred Parishes website is a section on famous people from our area. There is a short account of each of 21 past and present celebrities, from Dick Turpin to Jamie Oliver. Gustav Holst is one of these and I make no apology for repeating text from our website here:

GUSTAV HOLST (1874-1934)

While teaching and composing in London, Gustav Holst began a love affair with Thaxted after a walking holiday in the area led to his taking a weekend cottage nearby. A great attraction must have been its cathedral-sized church with spacious, white-painted interior, where he became involved with local music-making, encouraged by the town's socialist vicar, Conrad Noel. Holst himself was an active socialist.

In 1916, Holst invited some of his London pupils to spend four days of music-making in Thaxted in the town's first Whitsuntide festival. Sadly, this was repeated for only two more years before being moved to London to avoid Holst's pupils, especially those from St Paul's School, becoming associated with Noel's controversial extremist left-wing sermons. It was 1980 before the highly successful Thaxted Festival was re-established.

Holst stayed in Thaxted for several years working, amongst other things, on his acknowledged masterpiece, The Planets. He adapted the big melody from "Jupiter" to accompany the poem "I vow to thee, my country". This became a popular hymn and Holst named the tune "Thaxted". It has since been used for no fewer than fourteen other hymns worldwide as well as the anthem of the Rugby World Cup. Holst also composed the music for a popular Christmas carol, "In the Bleak Midwinter".

During these days of social distancing we are not able to travel and enjoy our beautiful area as much as before, but we can remind ourselves of what is out there and read about our rich local history on the Society's website.

Ken McDonald, Secretary

Photos:

Gustav Holst

Thaxted church