



LONDON SONG FESTIVAL Support London Song Festival



Tuesday Dec 15th, 7pm

ROADS TO SOLACE

He That Dwells in Shadows

The Songs and Poetry of Ivor Gurney (1890-1937)

Olivia Boen – soprano

Nigel Foster – piano

David Mildon – speaker

Programme devised by Nigel Foster

Song 1 - Desire in Spring (Francis Ledwidge, 1887-1917)

I love the cradle songs the mothers sing
In lonely places where the twilight drops,
The slow endearing melodies that bring
Sleep to the weeping lids; and when she stops,
I love the roadside birds upon the tops
Of dusty hedges in a world of Spring.

And when the rain drips from the edge
Of midday wind, the meadows lean one way,
And a long whisper passes through the sedge,

Beside the broken water let me stay,
While these old airs upon my memory play,
And silent changes colour up the hedge.

Song 2 - The Singer (Edward Shanks, 1892-1953)

In the dim light of the golden lamp
The singer stands and sings,
And the songs rise up like coloured bubbles
Or birds with shining wings.

And the movement of the merry or plaintive keys
Sounds in the silent air.
Till the listener feels the room no more
But only music there.

And still from the sweet and rounded mouth
The delicate songs arise,
Like floating bubbles whose colours are
The coloured melodies.

Song 3 - A Piper (Seumas O'Sullivan, 1879-1958)

A piper in the streets today
Set up, and tuned, and started to play,
And away, away, away on the tide
Of his music we started; on every side
Doors and windows were opened wide,
And women with petticoats coloured like flame,
And little bare feet that were blue with cold,
Went dancing back to the age of gold.
And all the world went gay, went gay,
For half an hour in the street today.

Song 4 - Dinny Hill (F W Harvey, 1888-1957) Transcribed and edited by Philip Lancaster 2020

On Dinny Hill the daffodil
Has crowned the year's returning,
The water cool in Placket Pool
Is ruffled up and burning
In little waves of fluttering fire;
And all the heart of my desire
Is now to be this day in Gloucestershire.

Song 5 - Walking Song (F W Harvey)

O Cranham ways are steep and green,
And Cranham ways are high,
And if I was that black rook
It's there that I would fly.

But since I'm here in London town,
A silly walking man;
I'll make this song and caw it
As loudly as I can.

Song 6 - Love shakes my soul (Bliss Carman, 1861-1929)

Love shakes my soul, like a mountain wind
Falling upon the trees,
When they are swayed and shaken and whitened and bowed
As the great gusts will.

I know why Daphne sped through the grove
When the bright god came by,
And shut herself in the laurel's heart
for her silent doom.

Love fills my heart, like my lover's breath
Filling the hollow flute,
Till the magic wood awakes and cries
With remembrance and joy.

Ah, timid syrinx, do I not know
Thy tremor of sweet fear?
For a beautiful and imperious player
Is the Lord of Life.

Song 7 – Nocturne (Vivian Locke-Ellis, 1878-1950) Transcribed and edited by Philip Lancaster 2020

When sets the sun on yonder hill
His white clouds slowly follow him;
Hours have they to linger still.
Mountain-pastured, cool and dim.

When at last the folded sky
Waiting dumbly for the stars,
Lets the wool-winged phantom fly,
Lures the great owl from his bars.

Then the little grass-lamp glows,
And the blackest snails untwine;
And the cautious hedgehog goes
Under the light-uddered kine.

But the tribes of haunted night,
Omened bird and bat and toad,
They must out of sound and sight
Where shepherd takes the road;

His white flocks are on the hill,
Hours they have to wait for him,
While the wool-winged bat is still,
And the great owl's eyelids dim

Song 8 – Scents (Edward Thomas, 1878-1917)

Today I think only of scents,
Scents dead leaves yield;
Bracken, wild carrot seed
And the square mustard field.

Odours that rise when the spade
Wounds the root of tree,
Rose, current, raspberry, gout-weed,
Rhubarb, celery.

The smoke's smell too
Blowing from where the bonfire burns the waste
The dead, the dangerous, and all to sweetness turns.
It is enough to smell, to crumble the dark earth
While the Robin sings over again
Sad songs of Autumn mirth.

Song 9 - Bright Clouds (Edward Thomas)

Bright clouds of may
Shade half the pond.
Beyond,
All but one bay
Of emerald
Tall reeds
Like criss-cross bayonets
Where a bird once called,
Lies bright as the sun.

No-one heeds.
The light wind frets
and drifts the scum
Of may blossom.
Till the moorhen calls
Again.
Naught's to be done

By birds or men.
Still the may falls

Song 10 - Ploughman Singing (John Clare, 1793-1864)

Here morning in the ploughman's songs is met
Ere yet one footstep shows in all the sky,
And twilight in the east, a doubt as yet,
Shows not her sleeve of grey to know her by.
Woke early, I arose and thought that first
In Winter-time of all the world was I.

The old owls might have halloed if they durst,
But joy just then was up and whistled by
A merry tune, which I had known full long,
But could not to my memory wake it back,
Until the ploughman changed it to the song.

O happiness, how simple is thy track!
Tinged like the willow shoots, the east's young brow
Glows red and finds thee singing at the plough.

Song 11 - I will go with my father a-ploughing (Seosamh MacCathmhaoil/Joseph Campbell, 1879-1944)

I will go with my father a-ploughing
To the green field by the sea,
And the rooks and the crows and the seagulls
Will come flocking after me.

I will sing to the patient horses
With the lark in the white of the air,
And my father will sing the plough song
That blesses the cleaving share.

I will go with my father a-sowing
To the red field by the sea,
And the rooks and the gulls and the starlings
Will come flocking after me.

I will sing to the striding sowers
With the finch on the greening sloe,
And my father will sing the seed song
That only the wise men know.

I will go with my father a-reaping
To the brown field by the sea,
And the geese and the crows and the children
Will come flocking after me.

I will sing to the tan-faced reapers
With the wren in the heat of the sun,
And my father will sing the scythe song
That joys for the harvest done.

**Song 12 - World Strangeness (William Watson, 1858-1935) Transcribed and edited by Philip Lancaster
2020**

Strange the world about me lies,
Never yet familiar grown -
Still disturbs me with surprise,
Haunts me like a face half known.

In this house with starry dome,
Floored with gemlike plains and seas,
Shall I never feel at home,
Never wholly be at ease?

Oh from room to room I stray,
Yet my host can ne'er espy,
And I know not to this day
Whether guest or captive I.

So, between the starry dome
And the floor of plains and seas,
I have never felt at home,
Never wholly been at ease.

**Song 13 - The World's Great Age Begins Anew (Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1792-1822) Transcribed and edited
by Philip Lancaster 2020**

The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winger weeds outworn.

Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.
A brighter Hellas rears its mountains

From waves serener far;
A new Peneus rolls his fountains
Against the morning star.

Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep
Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.
Another Athens shall arise,
And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies
The splendour of its prime;
And leave, if night so bright may live,
All earth can take or Heaven can give.

Song 14 - The Return of the Heroes (Walt Whitman, 1819-1892) Edited by Ian Venables and Philip Lancaster

For the lands and for these passionate days and for myself,
Now a while retire to thee
O soil of autumn fields,
Reclining on thy breast, giving myself to thee,
Answering the pulses of thy sane and equable heart,
Turning a verse for thee.

O Earth that hast no voice, confide to me a voice,
O harvest of my lands,
O boundless summer growths,
O lavish brown parturient earth,
O infinite teeming womb,
A song to narrate thee.

Song 15 - John Jeffreys (1927-2010) and Ivor Gurney - What evil coil of fate

What evil coil of Fate has fastened me
Who cannot move to sight, whose bread is sight,
And in nothing has more bare delight
Than dawn or the violet or the winter tree.
Stuck in the mud- Blinkered up, roped for the Fair,

What use to vessel breath that lengthens pain?
O but the empty joys of wasted air
That blow on Crickley and whimper wanting me!

Song 16 - O Dreamy, Gloomy Friendly Trees (Herbert Trench, 1865-1923) Transcribed and edited by Philip Lancaster 2020

O dreamy, gloomy, friendly trees,
I came along your narrow track
To bring my gifts unto your knees
And gifts did you give back;
For when I brought this heart that burns -
These thoughts that bitterly repine -
And laid them here among the ferns

And the hum of boughs divine,
Ye, vastest breathers of the air,
Shook down with slow and mighty poise
Your coolness on the human care,
Your wonder on its toys,
Your greenness on the heart's despair,
Your darkness on its noise.

Song 17 - Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) and Ivor Gurney - Only the wanderer

Only the wanderer
Knows England's graces,
Or can anew see clear
Familiar faces.

And who loves joy as he
That dwells in shadows?
Do not forget me quite,
O Severn meadows.

Song 18 - Western Sailors (Ivor Gurney), edited by Philip Lancaster and Ian Venables

I know a Western River where Spring goes first of all,
I know a sailor's village where the elm trees grow tall
And the folk in their walk and their half-sea, half farm-way talk
Bring names of tales and brighter fames as live as them all.

O you river, gliding to the sea,
I'll ne'er forget brown Severn while my life loves the sea.
Far out to wider waters all the old men have gone
To shores of great Atlantic I would love to look upon
Baltimore and Boston City, and the wide Hudson shore,
That their fathers found in danger with a wartime risk to run.
O you river, gliding to the West,
Of all the rivers yet I know,
I love the Severn best.

They came, those hearty sailors home at times from foreign parts.
New words and songs and salty yarns with sea-pride in their hearts,
Till I'd jump at any chance to cruise where Carolina's sand and pines
Heave first in sight for English folk with pride and salutes.
O you River gliding to the sea,

If you'll take me where I want to
I'll make chanties of thee,
Love's songs of thee.

Song 19 - John Jeffreys and Ivor Gurney - The songs I had

The songs I had are withered
Or vanished clean,
Yet there are bright tracks

Where I have been,
And there grow flowers
For other's delight,
Think well, O singer,
Soon comes night!

Song 20 - When I was one-and-twenty from Ludlow and Teme (A E Housman, 1859-1936)

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say;
Give crowns and pounds and guineas,
But not your heart away;

Give pearls away and rubies,
But keep your fancy free.
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain;

'Tis paid with sighs a-plenty,
And sold with endless rue.
And I am two-and-twenty,
And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true,

Song 21 - Lights Out (Edward Thomas)

I have come to the borders of sleep,
The unfathomable deep
Forest, where all must lose
Their way, however straight
Or winding, soon or late,
They cannot choose.

Here love ends
Despair, ambition ends;
All pleasure and all trouble,

Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends, in sleep that is sweeter
Than tasks most noble.

There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would not turn from now
To go into the unknown.
I must enter, and leave, alone
I know not how.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Song 1 - Desire in Spring (Francis Ledwidge, 1887-1917)

Desire in Spring was composed in December 1919 in Cornwall. It was two months after Gurney's discharge from the army and he was on holiday with a group of friends including the novelist Ethel Voynich. The party was walking on the cliffs; heading back at dusk, they realised Gurney was missing, they went back to look for him and found he had climbed to the top of a narrow 'chimney' in the rocks, and was writing this song.

Francis Ledwidge was born in County Meath to a poverty-stricken family. His father died when he was 5, so his mother had to go out to work. Francis left school at 13, working at manual jobs to support his family and writing poetry when he could. He became a trade union activist and politically aligned himself with Irish nationalists. While working as a road labourer he met the Anglo-Irish fantasy-writer Lord Dunsany who became his patron, promoted and published his poetry and introduced him to W B Yeats. Ledwidge enlisted in the Dunsany's regiment the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in 1914 against the wish of Dunsany, and against his nationalist principles, possibly because he had been dumped by his girlfriend Ellie Vaughey. He took well to army life however, and his first book of poems, *Songs of the Fields* (which includes the poem *Desire in Spring*) was published 1915. News of the Easter Rising changed his views, he overstayed his leave, got drunk in uniform and was court-martialled. However, he regained his stripes and returned to the Front and was killed in the Battle of Passchendaele on 31st July 1917. Lord Dunsany published *The Complete Poems of Francis Ledwidge* in 1919.

Song 2 - The Singer (Edward Shanks, 1892-1953)

The Singer was written in High Wycombe in November 1919.

Edward Shanks, an almost exact contemporary of Gurney, was born and grew up in London. He went to Merchant Taylor's School, then went on to read History at Trinity College Cambridge. Shanks fought in the Great War, was invalided out of the army in 1915 and transferred to war office. After the war he worked as a journalist, writing reviews for *The London Mercury* and *The Evening Standard*. His first volume of poetry, titled *Songs* was published 1915, followed by *Poems* (1916) and *The Queen of China and other Poems* (1919) which contains *The Singer*, which won the Hawthornden Prize for Imaginative Literature. Shanks also wrote science fiction novels, including *The People of the Ruins* (1920) which is about a man who is put into suspended animation in 1924 and wakes up 150 years later to discover a Britain that has been devastated by war and Marxist revolutionaries.

Song 3 - A Piper (Seumas O'Sullivan, 1879-1958)

Seumas O'Sullivan spent his entire life in Dublin. He was editor of *The Dublin Magazine* and published a total of 12 volumes of poetry, including *Verses, Sacred and Profane* (1908) from which the poem of this song is taken. He was a friend of W B Yeats, though they quarrelled regularly, which may explain why Yeats left him out of his anthology of Irish poets. His quarrelsome nature was due to his heavy drinking; Yeats is said to have remarked; "the trouble with Seumas is that when he's not drunk he's sober". O'Sullivan's Sunday afternoon 'at homes' were a regular feature of Dublin's literary life, rivalling Yeats' Monday evening 'at homes'.

Song 4 - Dinny Hill (F W Harvey, 1888-1957)

Dinny Hill is unpublished and has been transcribed and edited for this concert by Philip Lancaster. Dinny (or Denny) Hill is near Minsterworth, by the River Severn just west of Gloucester. Placket Pool is a tidal basin on the River Severn close by. The poem is the first stanza of F W Harvey's poem *Gloucestershire from abroad*.

Like Gurney, Frederick William Harvey was a native of Gloucestershire and was educated at The King's School in Gloucester. Harvey trained as a solicitor, before joining the Gloucester Regiment on August 8th 1914, only four days after Britain declared war on Germany. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal in August 1915. He was captured on August 17th 1916 in a German trench while on a reconnaissance mission and spent the rest of the war in German prisoner-of-war camps. Harvey had contributed to the trench newspaper *The Fifth Gloucester Gazette* and began writing poetry soon after he arrived in France. His first volume of poetry, *A Gloucester Lad at Home and Abroad* was published in 1916. and he wrote further poetry during his period in captivity. After the war Harvey resumed his legal career in Gloucestershire, running a practise as a defence lawyer in the Forest of Dean. He was a popular broadcaster on the BBC in Bristol, he loved music and was involved in several local choirs and used his position with the BBC to promote local musicians and authors. In

1920 he published *Comrades in Captivity*, an account of his years in the prisoner-of-war camps. He is buried at Minsterworth, near Gloucester, and was commemorated by a plaque in Gloucester Cathedral in 1980.

Song 5 - Walking Song (F W Harvey)

Cranham is a village on the Cotswold escarpment south-east of Gloucester. Gustav Holst lived here for a while and wrote his hymn *In the bleak mid-winter* setting words by Christina Rossetti in a house now called Midwinter Cottage. *Walking Song* was written 1919 and published OUP in 1928, one of the relatively few songs published in Gurney's lifetime. The poem is taken from Harvey's wartime collection *A Gloucester Lad at Home and Abroad* (1916)

Song 6 - Love shakes my soul (Bliss Carman, 1861-1929)

Gurney set seven of Bliss Carman's Sappho Songs during the summer of 1919. These have been assembled into a cycle by Richard Carder, using three that had already been published by OUP, and adding another four, hitherto unpublished. *Love shakes my soul* is one of the previously published ones.

The poems are by the Canadian poet William Bliss Carman from his volume *Sappho: One Hundred Lyrics* (1921). They are not translations, but original poems; fanciful reconstructions of Sappho's lost poems written in a style that Carman assumed Sappho may have used. They have very little scholarly value, but they are of their time and they did bring Sappho's poetry to a far wider audience than had hitherto had knowledge of it. The poem of *Love shakes my soul* references Daphne, turned into a laurel tree to escape from Apollo; and Syrinx, turned into a bed of reeds to escape from Pan, who made a pipe from one of the reeds.

Bliss Carman was born in New Brunswick, a descendent of the so-called United Empire Loyalists who fled from America to Nova Scotia during the Revolution. Bliss was his mother's maiden name. Carman went to the University of New Brunswick, and then Oxford and Edinburgh. In 1886 he went on to Harvard where his circle included the American poet Richard Hovey who was to become a close friend and collaborator. His first success came in 1894 with the publication of *Songs of Vagabondia*, a collaboration with Richard Hovey. There were to be three volumes; the initial volume was followed by *More Songs from Vagabondia* (1896) and *Last Songs from Vagabondia* (1900). The public could not get enough of these poems celebrating anti-materialism, individual freedom and the joys of comradeship.

Very little is known of Sappho's life, and her poetry only survives in fragmentary form. She was born on the island of Lesbos around 630 BC. The stories that she was exiled from Lesbos to Sicily, and that she killed herself by jumping of the Leucadian Cliffs on the island of Lefkada for the love of the ferryman Phaon can probably be discounted. Only 650 lines of her poetry survive, but we know that she was included in the Greek canon of nine lyric poets. Two editions of her poetry were produced in Alexandria in the 2nd century BC, one edited by Aristophanes of Byzantium and another by Aristarchus of Samothrace, a pupil of Aristophanes. Part of the reason that so much has been lost is that she wrote in the Aeolic Greek dialect, which was already arcane by Roman times and was quickly abandoned in favour of Attic and Homeric Greek. The early Christian leaders were very keen to destroy her work which they considered to be obscene. What we have are quotations in other ancient works, ranging from a whole poem to a single word, and a few scraps of papyrus. The Sackler Library at Oxford holds a fragment of papyrus from Oxyrhynchus which contains 27 lines of Sappho's poetry, including the *Tithonus Poem*, the oldest surviving fragment, dating from the 3rd century BC, which is also contained on the Cologne papyrus. Only two poems survive complete, the *Ode to Aphrodite* and the *Tithonus Poem*. It is interesting that in classical Athenian comedy Sappho was caricatured as a promiscuous heterosexual woman, and until the 18th century she was seen as a symbol of unrequited heterosexual female desire, only recently in historical terms has she come to be the symbol of homosexual female desire.

Song 7 - Nocturne (Vivian Locke-Ellis, 1878-1950)

Nocturne is unpublished and has been transcribed and edited for this concert by Philip Lancaster, it was written c1919.

Vivian Locke-Ellis's obituary in *The Times* on 1st June 1950 describes him as "the author of a number of poems of high quality in the grand tradition of English lyrical verse". He was one of the Georgian poets and was the financial backer behind John Middleton Murray's *Adelphi Magazine*, published between 1923 and 1955. His first published work was *Elegy* (1904) and his final work was *Collected Lyrical Poems* (1946). Locke-Ellis was an active member of 'The Saturdays', a London literary society founded in 1944,

Song 8 – Scents (Edward Thomas, 1878-1917) and Song 9 - Bright Clouds (Edward Thomas) *Scents* and *Bright Clouds* were both composed in 1920. The poem of *Scents* was written at Thomas' home in Steep, Hampshire on 4th April 1915, and that of *Bright Clouds* on 4th and 5th June 1916 while he was training with the Artists' Rifles Regiment at Hare Hall in Essex.

Edward Thomas was a Londoner, born in Lambeth to Welsh parentage. His father was a staff clerk at the Board of Trade who introduced him to literature, particularly the works of Isaac Walton (*The Compleat Angler*) and Richard Jefferies, works that instilled in Thomas a life-long and rather romanticised love of the English countryside. His first book *The Woodland Life* (1897) was dedicated to James Noble, the father of Helen, to whom Thomas was secretly engaged and whom he secretly married in Fulham in 1899 because of his father's disapproval of the match. They had two children together. When during the war he was asked what he was fighting for, he bent down, picked up a pinch of earth, and said: "Literally, for this". His publications include several guidebooks including *The Heart of England* (1906), *The South Country* (1909) and *The Icknield Way* (1913).

He went to Battersea Grammar School, St Paul's School and Lincoln College, Oxford and became a literary critic for *The Daily Chronicle*. He befriended his fellow Welsh poet W H Davies, and when he moved to Sevenoaks in Kent in 1905, he rented out a cottage to Davies. He began writing poetry around 1914, with the encouragement of the American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963) who was part of the literary community living in the Gloucestershire village of Dymock. Thomas became a part of this circle that included Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater and Wilfred Gibson. Thomas' most famous poem, *Adlestrop*, was written after his train stopped at that Gloucestershire railway station in June 1914. Thomas enlisted in the Artists' Rifles Officers' Training Corps in July 1915. Thomas was encouraged in this by Robert Frost, whose poem *The Road Not Taken* was written in response to Thomas' notorious indecision, particularly regarding whether or not he should enlist. Thomas was killed at the Battle of Arras in April 1917, shot through the chest. W H Davies' poem *Killed in Action* (*Edward Thomas*) expresses something of his friend's devastation at his death.

Song 10 - Ploughman Singing (John Clare, 1793-1864)

Ploughman Singing is dedicated to the poet Edmund Blunden, who edited *Poems, Chiefly from Manuscript* (1920), the volume of poems by John Clare that this text comes from.

John Clare was the son of a farm labourer, who wrote about the English countryside. From the age of 7 he worked in the fields, as a gardener and as a lime burner and began to write poetry. His parents were about to be evicted from their cottage, and to avoid this he offered his poems to Edward Drury, a local bookseller, who in turn offered them to his cousin John Taylor who worked for a publishing company, and so Clare's first volume of poetry, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* appeared in 1820. Clare visited London where he made friends including the essayist Charles Lamb and had a few brief weeks of celebrity. Two more volumes of poetry followed; *The Village Minstrel* (1821) and *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827) in the same vein as his first volume, but they had less success. The Marquess of Exeter, for whom Clare had worked as a gardener in his Burghley House estate, gave him an annuity, but his financial worries persisted. He had a wife and 7 children by this time, the strain of looking after and feeding them was getting too much and he began to suffer from mental health problems. He returned to working as a farm labourer. His last publication, *The Rural Muse* (1835), did not sell as rustic poetry was now unfashionable. In 1837 he was committed to a private asylum in Epping Forest. He was there for 4 years till he escaped in 1841 and walked back to Northborough, convinced that he was married to his first childhood love, Mary Joyce. When he was told by her family that they had never been married, and that she had in fact died 3 years previously, his mental health took a turn for the worse; he was declared insane and spent the final 23 years of his life in St Andrew's Asylum in Northampton, where, in a grim mirroring of Gurney's life, he wrote some of his greatest poetry.

Song 11 - I will go with my father a-ploughing (Seosamh MacCathmhaoil/Joseph Campbell, 1879-1944)

This song is dedicated to Marion Scott, violinist, musicologist and life-long friend and supporter of Ivor Gurney.

Seosamh MacCathmhaoil was the Celtic name of Joseph Campbell, poet, artist and Irish nationalist, born in Belfast. He worked with Herbert Hughes collecting and cataloguing Irish folk poetry and was a founding member of the Ulster Literary Theatre. He is best known in literary terms for the words he wrote to traditional Irish airs such as *My Lagan Love* and *Gartan Mother's Lullaby*. He took part in the Easter Rising of 1916 doing rescue work

and in 1921 he was elected as a Sinn Féin councillor in Wicklow. He was imprisoned during the Irish civil war; his marriage broke up and he emigrated to America in 1925. He lived in New York where he lectured at Fordham University and founded the university's School of Irish Studies in 1928. He was also the editor of the *Irish Review* magazine. He returned to Ireland in 1939 and lived in County Wicklow until he died in 1944.

Song 12 - World Strangeness (William Watson, 1858-1935)

World Strangeness is unpublished and has been transcribed and edited for this concert by Philip Lancaster. The song was written in August 1925 while Gurney was incarcerated in the City of London Mental Hospital in Dartford.

William Watson was a Yorkshireman but brought up in Liverpool as his father moved there for business. His first publication, *The Prince's Quest*, appeared in 1880 when he was 22 and his *Epigrams of Art, Life and Nature*, came out 4 years later. Other works followed in quick succession through the 1890s; particularly popular was *Wordsworth's Grave* (1891). When Tennyson died in 1892, Watson was the front-runner to take over as Poet Laureate, but a mental breakdown meant that Alfred Austin took the post instead. Watson was nevertheless granted a Civil List pension of £200. In 1894 his *Odes and other poems* was published. Watson became controversial during the Boer War (1899-1902) for writing poems which were anti-war and thought of as 'unpatriotic'. In 1903 he published *For England: Poems Written During Estrangement*, which attempted to negate his previous 'unpatriotic' views. His political views meant that he again missed out on the Laureateship in 1913 in favour of Robert Bridges. Another reason was that he had attacked Margot Asquith, the prime minister's wife, in a poem that included the lines *She is not old, she is not young, the woman with the serpent's tongue*. Watson was however given a knighthood in 1917. He slipped into obscurity in the years following the First World War.

Song 13 - The World's Great Age Begins Anew (Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1792-1822)

This song is unpublished and has been transcribed and edited for this concert by Philip Lancaster. Hellas is the Greek name for Greece (Hellenic Republic), Peneus is a river god.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born in Sussex, the illegitimate son of a Whig MP. He went to Eton, where he was cruelly bullied, and later Oxford, from which he was expelled when it was discovered that he was the author of a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. Soon afterwards Shelley eloped to Scotland to marry the 16-year old Harriet Westbrook, leading to him being disowned by his family. In 1814 Shelley abandoned Harriet (now pregnant with their son) and ran away to Switzerland with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, daughter of the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. In 1816 the couple returned to Switzerland together with Mary's stepsister Claire, who was infatuated with Shelley and, angry at being rejected by him, had instigated an affair with Lord Byron. They stayed in adjacent houses on the shore of Lake Geneva. Meanwhile Harriet committed suicide by drowning in the Serpentine in Hyde Park. Shelley now married Mary, and the couple moved to Italy, living in Venice close to Byron, and later Florence and Rome. Shelley was drowned in a sudden storm while in his sailing boat, the *Don Juan*. Conspiracy theories circulate to this day debating whether this was suicide, murder, or an accident.

Song 14 - The Return of the Heroes (Walt Whitman, 1819-1892)

This song is unpublished and has been edited and transcribed by Ian Venables and Philip Lancaster. It was written in October 1925 in the asylum.

Walt Whitman was born in Long Island, the second of nine children. The family moved to Brooklyn when he was four, and from an early age he was working to augment the family's meagre finances, doing small office jobs and working for publishers and printers. When he was 19, he founded his own newspaper, *The Long-Islander*, and he continued working for a succession of different newspapers after this was sold off. During the American civil war Whitman worked as a clerk in the army paymaster's office in Washington and volunteered as a nurse tending the wounded soldiers. He suffered a stroke in 1873 and moved to his brother's house in Camden New Jersey. He bought his own house in Camden (now the Walt Whitman Museum) in 1884 and lived there until he died. His

best-known work is *Leaves of Grass*, originally twelve poems published in 1855 which he expanded and revised throughout his life. The poems explore Whitman's philosophy of life and humanity and his homosexuality, they contain overt descriptions of pleasure and sensuality and were considered obscene at the time, but the work has since become one of the central and most important works of American poetry.

Song 15 - John Jeffreys (1927-2010) and Ivor Gurney - What evil coil of fate

John Jeffreys was born in Margate, Kent to Welsh parents. An early influence was his mother singing Welsh folksongs to him as a child. He served in the RAF and studied at Trinity College of Music. As a researcher, Jeffreys has worked on the lives and works of the Eccles family in the 17th and 18th centuries and the Elizabethan lutenist and composer Philip Rosseter, and as a composer he has written nearly 300 songs. However, severe self censorship and depression (his tonal, traditional style of music was very unfashionable in the 1970s) meant that only around 50 songs survive. Other works included a symphony, 3 violin concertos (written for his wife, the violinist Pauline Ashley, who was a fellow student with him at Trinity College), a cello concerto, string quartet and piano sonata, but Jeffreys destroyed all of these. Moving away from music, he took a job as a garden designer for Tottenham council in north London and published two books in 1974: *Hardy Plants for Small Gardens* and *Perennials for Cutting*. *What evil coil of fate* was written on 31st October 1964.

Song 16 - O Dreamy, Gloomy Friendly Trees (Herbert Trench, 1865-1923)

This song is unpublished and has been transcribed and edited for this concert by Philip Lancaster.

Herbert Trench was born in County Cork and studied at Keble College Oxford. From 1891 he worked as an examiner for the Board of Education. In 1908 he became Director of the Theatre Royal Haymarket; highlights of his time there were performances of Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* and Ibsen's *The Pretenders*. During the Great War he worked in Florence to promote better understanding between the peoples of Britain and Italy. Over his career he produced 7 volumes of poetry (the first, *Deirdre Wedded* in 1901), and a verse play, *Napoleon* (1918). He died in Boulogne-sur-Mer.

Song 17 - Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) and Ivor Gurney - Only the wanderer

This is from the set of songs *Oh Fair to see* Op 13b, published posthumously in 1965. In addition to the sets and cycles of songs published in Finzi's lifetime, he planned several further volumes, none of which were completed. After his death, 26 songs were found, dating from throughout Finzi's career, that had not been placed in volumes, these were posthumously placed in 4 new sets of songs, titled *Till Earth Outwears*, *I said to Love*, *To a Poet*, and *Of Fair to See*. This setting of Gurney's poem dates from 1925. Gurney wrote the poem while serving in the trenches. It is inscribed and dated 'Caulaincourt, March 1917' and was written for Miss Dorothy Dawe, who later became Mrs Herbert Howells. It was published as part of Gurney's volume *Severn and Somme*.

Gerald Finzi was born in London. His family moved to Harrogate and Finzi studied with Ernest Farrar, a student of Stanford. Farrar's death on the Western Front, together with the loss of all three of his brothers, affected Finzi deeply. He found solace in the poetry of Thomas Hardy, who he saw as a kindred spirit. 5 years attached to York Minster followed, studying with Edward Bairstow, then Finzi moved to Painswick in Gloucestershire to concentrate on composing. Vaughan Williams helped him to obtain a teaching post at the Royal Academy of Music in 1930. He never felt at home in the city though, and moved to Wiltshire after marrying Joy Black, where he composed and also grew apples, saving several rare English apple varieties from extinction, and collecting a library of over 3000 volumes of poetry.

Through the 1930s and 40s Finzi worked hard to promote Gurney's music, arranging for its publication by OUP. In 1939 the Finzi's moved to Ashmansworth in Hampshire. He founded the Newbury String Players and Newbury Festival, both of which are still going. During World War II he worked for the Ministry of War Transport and housed German and Czech refugees in his home.

In 1951 Finzi learned he had the incurable Hodgkin's Disease, and he died 4 years later age just 55.

Song 18 - Western Sailors (Ivor Gurney)

Western Sailors is unpublished and has been edited and transcribed by Ian Venables and Philip Lancaster. It was written in March 1926 and is one of Gurney's last songs, written in the asylum. Incarcerated in this bleak and

barren place, Gurney reaches out in his mind to places far away. The sailors Gurney writes about speak of going to America, but the only place that Gurney is interested in going to is his beloved Gloucestershire, and to the River Severn. There are relatively few instances where Gurney sets his own words, but where he does, as in the wartime song *Severn Meadows*, the result is always special.

Song 19 - John Jeffreys and Ivor Gurney - The songs I had

The Songs I had was written on 8th February 1963 at Cheshunt, and is dedicated to Barry Duane Hill, a poet set twelve times by Jeffreys, most notably in his song-cycle *The Fox* for tenor, French horn and string quartet.

Song 20 - When I was one-and-twenty from Ludlow and Teme (A E Housman, 1859-1936) The cycle *Ludlow and Teme* was published by Stainer and Bell under the auspices of the Carnegie Trust in 1923, while Gurney was in the asylum. It exists in two versions, for voice and piano, and voice with string quartet and piano. This song was performed at the asylum on 27th March 1925 by tenor Alfred Capel Dixon and pianist Arthur Benjamin to a mixed audience of patients and medical staff. This is the only known time that Gurney's music is known to have been performed in the asylum.

A E Housman was born in Worcestershire, and at the time of writing the set of 63 poems that make up *A Shropshire Lad* he had never set foot in that county, though the Shropshire hills are visible from neighbouring Worcestershire. For him they were places of mist and mystery, visible but out of reach. He published *A Shropshire Lad* at his own expense in 1896 after several publishers, including Macmillan, had turned them down. Arthur Somervell was the first composer to set his words (his cycle *A Shropshire Lad* was written in 1904) and thereafter he became the second most commonly set poet in the English language after Shakespeare. After leaving Oxford Housman worked as a clerk at the Patent Office in London. In 1892 he was appointed Professor of Latin at London University, in 1911 he was appointed Kennedy Professor of Latin at Cambridge. Between 1903 and 1930 he worked on his five-volume definitive edition of the works of Manilius.

While at Oxford Housman met Moses Jackson, a fellow student at St John's College, who was the love of his life. This must be one of the greatest and saddest stories of unrequited love; Jackson was instrumental in getting Housman his job at the Patent Office, and Housman shared lodgings in Bayswater with Moses and his brother for two years, an arrangement which ended abruptly when Housman finally declared his feelings for Jackson. The Criminal Law Amendment Act had just passed into law, making any form of homosexuality illegal, and in any case, Jackson was completely heterosexual. Jackson became Principal of Sind College in Karachi in 1887, a move doubtless made to put as much distance as possible between himself and Housman. When Jackson got married in 1889, out of kindness he didn't tell Housman, knowing how devastated he would be by the news. In the early 1920s as Jackson lay dying in Canada, Housman wished to assemble his best unpublished poems into one volume so that Jackson could read them before he died. He published them in 1922 under the title *Last Poems*. It is not known whether Jackson did read them before he died in 1923.

This great unrequited love coloured every aspect of Housman's poetry, life and work. He died in 1936, age 77. His ashes were taken to St Lawrence's Church in Ludlow, Shropshire to be buried. In 1942 Housman's brother Laurence deposited an essay entitled *A. E. Housman's 'De Amicitia'* in the British Library, with instructions that it was not to be published for 25 years. This essay goes into details about Housman's homosexuality and his love for Moses Jackson. It was finally published in 1976.

Song 21 - Lights Out (Edward Thomas)

Lights Out was one of Edward Thomas' final poems, written in 1916. Thomas wrote to the author Eleanor Farjeon on November 6th 1916; "Now I have actually done still another piece which I shall call 'Lights Out'. It sums up what I have often thought at that call. I wish it were as brief - 2 pairs of long notes. I wonder is it nearly as good as it might be". Thomas' wife Helen was worried that that this poem might have been a suicide note; Thomas had suffered a breakdown in 1911 and was prone to depression for much of his life.

Gurney's setting was written at Christmas 1919 at Hucclecote on the outskirts of Gloucester. Michael Pilkington considers that *Lights Out* "may well rank as Gurney's finest work". Gurney certainly felt an affinity with the poems of Edward Thomas and set his words a total of nineteen times.

Ivor Gurney (1890 – 1937) – A summary of his life

Ivor Gurney was very much a son of Gloucestershire. He was born in Gloucester and at the age of 10, became a chorister in the cathedral and a pupil at the King's School. Important friendships were established with F W Harvey and Herbert Howells. From an early age the beauty of the Cotswold hills made a deep impression on Gurney.

In 1911, when Gurney was 21, he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, where he studied under Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. Another important person in Gurney's story was Marion Scott, secretary to the RCM Union and editor of the RCM magazine, who was to become a life-long friend. To help make ends meet, Gurney took a job as organist at High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, the churchwarden Edward Chapman became a friend and Gurney was to spend many happy hours with the Chapman family and their 4 children.

In 1913 Gurney suffered a minor nervous breakdown. He had always suffered from bouts of depression, and he took time off from the Royal College of Music to spend time in his beloved Gloucestershire to recover. In December he wrote 5 of his finest early songs, the *Five Elizabethan Songs*. The following July he returned to the Royal College, but his studies were interrupted by the outbreak of war.

Gurney tried to enlist in the 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment (known as the Glosters) but was rejected because of his weak eyesight. He tried again in February 1915 and was accepted. After training in Essex and on Salisbury Plain the regiment sailed to France ready for the trenches. Gurney's way of surviving the horrors of trench warfare was to write poetry. He also wrote music, one of his greatest wartime songs is *In Flanders* to a poem by his friend Harvey. Another great wartime song is *Severn Meadows*, in which he sets his own words.

On 17th April 1917, Gurney was wounded, shot in the arm. He spent some time in a military hospital in Rouen, then sent back to the Front. On 17th September he was caught in a gas attack, sent back to Britain and admitted to the Bangour War Hospital in Edinburgh. Gurney fell in love with Annie Nelson Drummond, one of the nurses at Bangour. Meanwhile a volume of his poetry, *Severn and Somme* had been published; Gurney had been sending all his poems by post to Marion Scott who arranged to have them published by Sidgwick and Jackson.

In November 1917 he was discharged from Bangour and sent on a signalling course at Seaton Delaval in Northumberland. He became depressed and his mental condition worsened, tipped over the edge when Annie Nelson Drummond stopped writing to him. He was transferred to a series of hospitals; Brancepeth Castle in Durham, Lord Derby's War Hospital in Warrington and the Middlesex War Hospital in Napsbury. In June 1918 he wrote to Sir Hubert Parry, Principal of the RCM and to Marion Scott threatening suicide. He seemed outwardly to recover though, and in October 1918 was discharged from the army.

Gurney returned to Gloucester; friends rallied round though some in his family were unsympathetic. Jack Haines took him walking in Wales, Edward Chapman came to visit, and Ethel Voynich took him on holiday to Cornwall, during which he wrote his song *Desire in Spring*. In February 1919 Gurney's friend Harvey arrived back from captivity, he had been in a prisoner-of-war camp since 1916, and he and Gurney gave a concert in Stroud in March, Harvey singing and Gurney playing piano. That autumn Gurney resumed his studies at the RCM, this time with Vaughan Williams. A second volume of poetry, *War's Embers* was published that autumn, and the poet John Masefield invited Gurney and Harvey to visit him in Oxfordshire. Gurney resumed his job as organist at High Wycombe, and with it his friendship with the Chapman family. The years 1919-1922 were his most prolific for song-writing, and he often set poems by his friends Harvey and Haines. Gurney was finding life in London and at the RCM difficult, he felt the pull of Gloucestershire, and on one occasion walked there by night from London. In 1921 he took a labourer's job at Dryhill Farm, near Cheltenham.

In 1922 Gurney abandoned his studies at the RCM and went to live with an aunt in the outskirts of Gloucester. He tried many jobs; as farm labourer, cinema organist, church organist, a clerk in a tax office, but his mental state didn't allow him to hold down any of them. He could no longer live with his aunt, so he arrived unannounced at his brother's house in Gloucester. Here his behaviour became more and more irrational, long nocturnal walks, arriving back at the house in the middle of the night, leaving mud on the furniture, erratic eating habits, frightening his brother and his wife with tales of being tortured and being bombarded with radio waves. In September 1922 Gurney was admitted as a patient to Barnwood House mental hospital in Gloucester. A desperate night-time escape during which he injured himself and the police were called led to the decision to move him to the City of London Mental Hospital in Dartford, Kent. He was admitted there on 21st December 1922.

Gurney remained at the asylum (with only a few outings allowed in the early stages of his incarceration) until his death 15 years later. He continued to write songs and poetry, works that are now being re-evaluated and seen as equal to his greatest works of the previous years. He received visits from the ever-faithful Marion Scott, from Vaughan Williams, Will Harvey, Herbert Howells and Helen Thomas, widow of the war poet Edward Thomas whose poems Gurney had often set. Gurney died of tuberculosis on 26th December 1937 and was finally allowed to return to his beloved Gloucestershire to be buried at Twigworth church. Herbert Howells played the organ at the funeral, and Harvey was present. Also present was Gerald Finzi, a young composer who was to do a lot to promote Ivor Gurney's music and get it published and performed over the next two decades.

Nigel Foster