

BBC Prom tells story of Elgar at University of Birmingham

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The role played by the composers Elgar and Bantock in establishing a Chair of Music at the University of Birmingham was explored in a **BBC Radio 3** (http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b038ld15/Twenty_Minutes_Elgar_and_Bantock_in_Birmingham) programme broadcast on Wednesday 21 August 2013.

Birmingham alumna Fiona Clampin (Comb Hons Music and French, 1995) looked at how the professorship came to be set up at the end of 1904, thanks to an endowment of £10,000 from local businessman Richard Peyton.

The 20-minute programme, produced by James Cook, was aired in the interval of the live BBC Prom – a concert which featured music by Sir Edward Elgar and Sir Granville Bantock in the second half. Contributors included the English music scholar Lewis Foreman and current Peyton and Barber Professor of Music Andrew Kirkman.

Elgar was persuaded to accept the post of first Professor of Music by staff at the university, and friends including Granville Bantock. Elgar's wife Alice's diary from 1904, held in the university's special collections, shows what a difficult decision it was for the composer to make. He wasn't fond of teaching and was concerned that the duties expected of a Chair of Music would take up time that should be spent composing.

Using material from the special collections, as well as letters from the **Elgar Birthplace Museum** (<http://www.elgarmuseum.org/>) at Lower Broadheath near Worcester, the programme told the story of Elgar's appointment and subsequent resignation after three years and not a great deal of activity.

Elgar's friend Granville Bantock replaced him as Peyton professor in 1908, and stayed in post until 1934. Bantock drew up a syllabus for the first music students, which included analysis of some extremely modern music for its day. He insisted on giving undergraduates a broad education by having them study additional subjects other than music – a tradition that continues to this day on the BMus course.

Fiona Clampin said: "The University and the Elgar Birthplace Museum have been very generous with their time and allowed me access to this wonderful resource of archive material. One personal favourite is a letter in the special collections from Mary Chamberlain to her step-son Neville, the future Prime Minister. She makes a reference to the appointment of Granville Bantock as professor of music, and how he will be obliged to teach the music of the past to his students.

"Bantock had a reputation as an enfant terrible and he refers to himself in one of the letters as an 'arch-devil'. But although we probably remember Elgar's name more, it's been fascinating to find out how much Bantock did to establish the music course, as well as develop two Birmingham institutions that are still going strong – the Conservatoire and the CBSO. Bantock is really the hero of the piece."

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