



AGS News

12 Winter 2009/10



Welcome to the latest edition of AGS News, the forum of The Armstrong Gibbs Society, which covers events, people and music.

Walter de la Mare Society

Angela Aries



Laurette Guest writes:

THE AESS CELEBRATION OF ARMSTRONG GIBBS

The 50th anniversary of Gibbs' death falls this year, 2010. The trustees are keen to promote and support any events to mark the occasion. We were therefore pleased to be able to attend one such event on 7th February in the intimate atmosphere of the Budworth Hall, Chipping Ongar, where the Association of English Singers and Speakers, together with the AGS and the Lea Valley Incorporated Society of Musicians, held an afternoon's "Celebration of Armstrong Gibbs".

The two-hour programme consisted of some thirty –four poems mostly by Walter de la Mare, but including J Masfield, A Tennyson, R L Stevenson and others. Some were recited and others sung to settings by Gibbs.

The first half was introduced by an excellent biographical presentation entitled "Armstrong Gibbs, the Man", written by Angela Aries and read in her unavoidable absence by Christopher Kingsley. The second half was prefaced by Michael Pilkington's presentation of "Gibbs the Songwriter". As an expert on English song Michael Pilkington was able to give some intriguing insights into Gibbs's career and his considerable gifts as a songwriter. He also made reference to R Hancock Child's research into Gibbs the Ballad-maker, concluding his talk by reading an extract from it.

The performers, - singers, readers and accompanists, - were diverse in their ages and experience, ranging from professionals such as Graham Trew and Mark Wilde, to the youngster who won the Gibbs' song trophy in the Chelmsford competitive festival. She sang "Dusk" accompanied by her singing teacher - and the Cup! The programme was rounded off by members of the Milton Keynes Youth Chorale who gave a very accomplished performance of excerpts from "A Saviour Born". Overall,

the standard of recitation and singing was high and a pleasure to listen to. Although on the long side, the wide variety of the programme and the high standard of the performances held our attention.

Congratulations should go to Patricia Williams for organizing so many singers, readers and accompanists to come together to help put Armstrong Gibbs on the map in this anniversary year. The audience of some eighty people included Giles de la Mare and his wife, and Ann and Lyndon Rust, who travelled considerable distances to be able to attend. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon and the friendly atmosphere of the occasion.

Members of the AGS set up a promotional display board in the hall, and were pleased to sign up two new members for the Society. As a trustee I felt it had been a worthwhile exercise and an enjoyable way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

Memory Lane

An evacuee writes:(2)

I have many happy memories of my stay in Little Baddow. Mrs Gibbs took Jean and I to a small restaurant in Woodham Walter for afternoon tea, we also went shopping in Chelmsford. We went to lunch at Ann's nannies house, I remember it was the first time I had tasted baked parsnips, I have liked them ever since. It was a very severe winter, the pond at Eaves Corner was frozen over and the villagers were able to skate on it. There was a thatched bungalow at the entrance to Blakes Wood, the icicles reached from the thatch to the ground fencing the people in. I remember there was a Foot and Mouth scare, the farms had long troughs of disinfectant across the entrances. My love of the countryside came from my stay in Little Baddow.

Dr and Mrs Gibbs had a cook and a parlour maid (Jessie and Evelyn). Jessie made jam and pickles from the kitchen garden produce. They were both

very kind to Jean and I. On my 12th birthday I had an attack of quinsy and could not swallow, Jessie made me a jelly with candles all round the edge.

Dr Gibbs was quite surprised wne my father cycled from Tottenham to see me; he was made very welcome. Jean's father was killed in action and she returned home to her Mother, I was left on my own until I returned to my parents.

I have a Prayer Book signed Dr and Mrs Gibbs Christmas 1939, A Bible signed Jessie and Evelyn Christmas 1939, and a newspaper account of Ann's wedding with a photo of Ann arriving at Danbury Church on Dr Gibbs arm.

There are so many memories

It was a beautiful house with a very long garden reaching down to Lingwood Common, a field on one side of the garden housed Ann's pony and a field on the other side was full of daffodils. Ann was at Boarding School, I went into the field to feed the pony one day, and inadvertently left the gate open, the pony trotted straight across the tennis court, which left deep hoof marks. I had to go to the study to explain to Dr Gibbs what I had done, I was terrified, but Dr Gibbs was very understanding.

The first Sunday we were there we went to Danbury church with Mrs Gibbs and David who was home on leave. David used his small sports car; Mrs Gibbs, Jean and I walked. Whilst we were in church War was declared and the Vicar advised the congregation to return home as soon as possible. Mrs Gibbs sat next to David in the car, Jean and I sat on the hood with Mrs Gibbs holding on to our legs so that we did not fall off.

Dr Gibbs conducted the choir at Danbury church, every Friday evening the choristers came to the house to rehearse the Hymns for the following Sunday, it was lovely to listen to them.

Doreen Gray



From the Records

In a letter to her daughter in April 1950, Honor Gibbs describes the festival at Oundle:

"So much of humour and interest happened at Oundle. I longed to have time to write you a long account – from the old lady of 82 who had been

Queen Mary's Lady in Waiting and a good old battleaxe too who gave away the prizes with great vigour and aplomb – to the old granny of nearly the same age who sang with her contemporaries in the WI choir; and the excellent male choir of Latvian d.ps from Corby steel works who won a cup amid great applause and cheering and gave us an encore in their own language. All dressed alike in smart navy suits provided by the British government."

"And then the church choirs – whose competition took part in the really lovely old church – and Dad's opening speech in which he said he wished all choirs could be judged in the churches for music was for the greater glory of God."

"Then there was the enthusiastic and v. stout secretary who came running to greet us, tripped and fell heavily – I rushed to help her up – 'all right dear, always doing it – never hurt. I bounce – so beautifully fat.'"



NEWS AND VIEWS

2010 Celebrations

8th May 2010
Armstrong Gibbs Society AGM

9th May 2010
Choral Evensong to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death

12th May 2010
Fiftieth anniversary of the death of Armstrong Gibbs

10th -12th September 2010
Second Armstrong Gibbs music festival

For regular updates on events please visit the Armstrong Gibbs website at www.armstronggibbs.com

See Next Issue for **CAG Soundbites**, **From the Records**, **Memory Lane**, and **News and Views**. Please send contributions to the editor:
Angela Aries, 16, Runsell Close, Danbury, CM3 4PQ,
or e-mail (angela.aries@btinternet.com).