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# Britten's *Gloriana*



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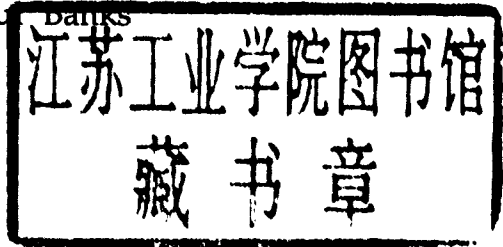
Edited by PAUL BANKS

# Britten's *Gloriana*

ESSAYS AND SOURCES

EDITED BY

Paul Banks



THE BOYDELL PRESS

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*Volume 1*

**Britten's *Gloriana***

ESSAYS AND SOURCES

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## Preface

The origin of this volume was an event associated with one anniversary – a study course devoted to *Gloriana* at the Britten–Pears School in 1991 which coincided with the 90th birthday of Joan Cross, who created the role of Elizabeth I in 1953 – and its appearance coincides with a second – the fortieth anniversary of the opera's ill-fated première. Happily the latter event is also marked by the first appearance of *Gloriana* on CD: perhaps the opera will now receive its well-merited reassessment. If so this collection of studies and bibliographical material may contribute to a more informed debate about the work – its intrinsic qualities, and its place in Britten's operatic canon – but the differences in emphasis and evaluations offered by the team of authors also suggest that the debate will raise fundamental critical issues and may not be characterized, wholly, by unanimity of view. Except, that is, the view that *Gloriana* deserves (and survives) a more penetrating examination than it received in 1953.

All the contributors to the volume took part in the 1991 study course, and of the first five chapters all except the third were given as papers during the weekend. The background to the list of sources is outlined in the preliminary notes to chapter six; the bibliography grew out of the research which formed the basis of chapter three. There is no conventional list of the sources cited in the text, but if they do not fall within the parameters of the bibliography, such sources are included under the author's or editor's name in the index.

The idea of publishing papers from a Britten–Pears School study course had been mooted in the past, but it is thanks to the interest and commitment of Richard Barber of Boydell & Brewer Ltd that such good intentions have been realized. Not only that: with this volume a series is launched which it is hoped will reflect in diverse ways the astonishing musical heritage, extensive archival resources and vibrant musical life of Aldeburgh and, more broadly, East Anglia. Much of that richness has its roots in the lives of three outstanding musicians – Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears and Imogen Holst – and it is inevitable that the pre-eminence of their contribution will be reflected in the series. But not exclusively. A new generation of composers and performers is now heard in Aldeburgh, new music education projects are promoted by the Aldeburgh Foundation and the libraries – the Britten–Pears Library in Aldeburgh, and the Holst Library at Snape – have collections which extend into unexpected repertoires. The series will try to encompass this diversity.

Paul Banks  
March 1993

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost I have to thank the contributors, not just for their papers, but the patience with which they have shown when little seemed to be happening, and the speed and helpfulness of their responses to often unreasonable requests as the inevitable deadlines approached.

This volume reflects, to varying degrees, the help and co-operation of five organizations. Kathy Wolfenden and her team at the Britten-Pears School ensured that the original course was enjoyed by all who attended, and thus created the harmonious background out of which this collaboration has emerged. Since then many of the mundane but essential chores entailed in producing a scholarly volume have fallen onto the shoulders of the staff of the Britten-Pears Library; in particular I would like to thank Pam Wheeler for innumerable insights from the archive, and Judith Henderson, without whose painstaking checking the text would have been far less accurate or complete than it is.

Even a cursory glance through the list of sources will reveal the extent of our debt to Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd. Some publishers seem intimidated by requests for detailed information about their publications, but from the outset Boosey & Hawkes have offered their fullest co-operation and have devoted considerable time and energy to the project. In particular I would like to thank Tony Fell, Paula Rainsborough, Jo Daly, Malcolm Smith and Ian Julier for their tireless efforts. The result offers some small indication of the immense work undertaken on Britten's behalf by Boosey & Hawkes, and also a fascinating glimpse into the world of British music publishing in the mid-twentieth century.

In the last stages of course it has been Richard Barber and the staff at Boydell & Brewer who have borne the brunt of the project, which they have done with good humour and patience. Throughout the book has been enthusiastically supported by the Trustees of the Britten-Pears Foundation, and in particular by Hugh Cobbe, the Chairman of the Library Committee: to them my warmest thanks.

Finally it is a pleasure to record the gratitude of all the contributors to those individuals who have responded to our requests for information and help with great generosity: Martin Aylmore (Royal Artillery Band), Chris Banks (British Library, Music Library), Jonathan Burton (English National Opera, Music Library), Richard Chesser (British Library, Music Library), Timothy Day (British Library, National Sound Archive), John Dingle, Osian Ellis, Colin Graham, Lord Harewood, Sir Rupert Hart-Davis, David Stone, Tom Tillery

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

(Royal Opera House, Music Library). I have one personal appreciation: to my wife Chris, who has not only been a source of advice and encouragement throughout, but has also borne the burden of a husband distracted by the demands of editorship, with exceptional good humour.

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## List of Abbreviations

bar.	baritone	no.	number
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation	ob.	oboe
bsn	bassoon	p., pp.	page, pages
cl.	clarinet	perc.	percussion
cm.	centimetre(s)	picc.	piccolo
db.	double bass	pl.	plate
dbsn	double bassoon	r	<i>recto</i>
desc.	descant	rec.	recorder
ed.	edition; editor	ri	rear outer wrapper/cover
EOG	English Opera Group	ro	rear inner wrapper/cover
Ex.	Example	rpm	revolutions per minute
fi	front inner wrapper/cover	sax.	saxophone
fl.	flute	sc.	scene
fn.	footnote	s.l.	sine loco
fo	front outer wrapper/cover	s.n.	sine nomine
fol.	folio(s)	sop.	soprano
hn	horn	ten.	tenor
hp	harp	tp	title page
ht	half-title	tr.	translator, translated
in.	inch(es)	trb.	trombone
ips	inches per second	treb.	treble
mezzo	mezzo-soprano	trpt	trumpet
min.	minute(s)	v	<i>verso</i>
LSO	London Symphony Orchestra	vcl.	violoncello
ML	Music & Letters	vla	viola
ms.,	manuscript	vln	violin
mss	manuscripts	vol.	volume
MT	<i>Musical Times</i>	vols	volumes
n.d.	no date	wm	watermark

### *Library sigla*

GB-ALb	Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh
GB-ALhf	Holst Foundation, Aldeburgh
GB-ALrs	Collection of Rosamund Strode, Aldeburgh
GB-Lbbc	BBC Sound Archive

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>GB-Lbh</b>	Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd., London
<b>GB-Lbl</b>	British Library, London
<b>GB-Leno</b>	English National Opera, London
<b>GB-Lnsa</b>	British Library, National Sound Archive, London

### *Conventions*

Scenes are normally identified by the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* convention. Thus Act two, scene three would be represented by 2.iii; individual numbers are identified in the form 2.iii.5. The only exceptions appear in the list of sources where such abbreviations are sometimes avoided because of the predominance of numerals in the surrounding description. Particular bars are identified using rehearsal numbers (which appear only in the fourth edition of the vocal score ((M)/V17) and the study score ((M)/F11)) with superscript numerals were necessary. Thus two bars before Fig. 167 would be represented as 'Fig. 167<sup>-2</sup>', and four bars after, by 'Fig. 167<sup>+4</sup>'.

Specific sources listed in the list are usually identified in the form (M)/F7, where the letter in parentheses indicates the work or variant concerned, and the characters after the oblique stroke the source listed under that work or variant.

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# 'Happy were He': Benjamin Britten and the *Gloriana* Story<sup>1</sup>

ROBERT HEWISON

Of all of Benjamin Britten's major works, there is only one that has not subsequently become a commercial recording, on CD, tape or disc. That is his opera for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, *Gloriana*. For almost forty years, the complete recording of *Gloriana* has been missing from the record catalogues, apart from a specialist video recording.<sup>2</sup> There may be technical reasons for this – a difficulty in getting the right singers, or orchestra or conductor – but the likeliest reason is that, in the words of one of those most closely connected with the project, Lord Harewood, the first night of *Gloriana* was 'one of the great disasters of operatic history'.<sup>3</sup> I am going to argue that the reasons for this disaster were not musical, but cultural. I hope to show that the failure was not Britten's but that of his audience, and that with the perspective of history, we can now see that *Gloriana* was a more prescient work than was realized on that terrible first night on the 8 June 1953. To do so requires some consideration of the circumstances in which Great Britain found itself at the beginning of our present Queen's reign, and of the political and social climate in which *Gloriana* was commissioned and composed. Artists are of course individuals, with their own creative imperatives, but the distinctly public nature of this 'Royal' opera placed special demands on Benjamin Britten's genius.

Ever since the success of *Peter Grimes* in 1945, Britten had enjoyed a growing reputation, to the point where he could almost be considered as an official artist. This position was confirmed when the Arts Council decided in 1949 that he should be commissioned to write an opera as part of the celebrations

<sup>1</sup> This essay is a revised version of a lecture given at the Aldeburgh Festival, 25 June 1992, and originally presented at the Study Course on *Gloriana* in September 1991. The author would like to express his thanks to Lord Harewood for his help in preparing this paper.

<sup>2</sup> A recording of the 1984 production by English National Opera was undertaken and it was planned that this would be issued in all sound and video formats (see Nicholas John, ed., *Peter Grimes, Gloriana*, Opera Guide 24 (London: John Calder, 1983), 127), but in the event only a video cassette and laser disc were ever published. Fortunately other important, but unpublished, recordings of the opera and related works, survive (see the List of Sources, pp. 95–170 below).

<sup>3</sup> Lord Harewood, *The Tongs and the Bones* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 138.

connected with the Festival of Britain in 1951. That opera was *Billy Budd*. As it happens, *Billy Budd* cannot be described as particularly festive, nor for that matter was it performed until after the Festival was officially over, but in terms of the context in which *Gloriana* must be seen, there is an important connection between the Festival of Britain in 1951 and the Coronation in 1953. The Festival and the Coronation were *state* events. Looked at together, they mark the passage from the immediate post-war austerity of the late 1940s to the growing affluence of the 1950s. At a deeper level, they were both concerned with questions of national identity, and how that identity could not only be asserted, but renewed in the difficult social and economic climate of the post-war period.

Yet, while I shall argue ultimately for a continuity between the Festival and the Coronation, there is a key local difference between the sponsors of the two events. The Festival of Britain was the last party given by the Labour government that had set out to create the Welfare State in 1945. The Coronation was one of the first thrown by the Conservative government that was to manage the political consensus of the 1950s. It is not unusual for governments to organize great expositions or other public spectacles as a way of demonstrating recovery after a period of national danger and stress. The French did it after the Revolution and the Terror that followed, and again after the debacle of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. The Americans did so after the Civil War. Perhaps it is significant that both these countries are republics, and therefore had to invent the spectacles that a monarchy might more spontaneously have engendered.

The idea of marking the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 had been first mooted in 1943. The message of national recovery was explicit in the terms of reference of the Ramsden Committee, set up in 1945 to consider a 'Universal International Exposition' in Hyde Park, that would demonstrate to the world the recovery of the United Kingdom from the effects of war in the moral, cultural, spiritual and material fields.<sup>4</sup> When the decision to go ahead was taken in 1947 the idea was whittled down to a national, rather than international exhibition, but it remained for Herbert Morrison, the Government minister responsible, 'a great symbol of national regeneration'.<sup>5</sup> Morrison described the Festival site as 'new Britain springing from the battered fabric of the old'.<sup>6</sup>

The Festival was planned by a special directorate, under the control of a Festival Council operating at what we would now call 'arm's length' from the Government. The Festival Council worked closely with the Council of Industrial Design, which helped select the exhibits, while the accompanying arts events were made the responsibility of the Arts Council, then a relatively fledgling body, set up in 1945 following the success of the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). While Morrison was not

<sup>4</sup> Mary Banham and Bevis Hillier, eds, *A Tonic to the Nation: The Festival of Britain 1951* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 27

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Donoghue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 492.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

unaware of the potential political benefits to Labour of the event, he was scrupulous in excluding direct party political propaganda. This did not stop the Conservative opposition making party political points against the alleged extravagance of the Festival at a time of extreme material shortages, but Churchill's criticisms were muted by the choice of his former Chief of Staff, Lord Ismay, as Chairman of the Festival Council. Opposition was further muted when the King and Queen became patrons of the Festival in 1950. The most consistent opposition came from Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard* and *Daily Express*.

With a budget of £11 million, the Festival consisted not only of the South Bank exhibition, but the Pleasure Gardens in Battersea, architecture in Poplar, science at South Kensington, industrial power in Glasgow, farming in Belfast, a travelling exhibition, and a Festival ship, the converted aircraft carrier *Campania*. There were also a great many local celebrations, encouraged, but not financially supported by the Festival Council. The Arts Council organized a special season of exhibitions, music and drama in London, and gave extra help to local arts festivals, some of which, like Aldeburgh, were already in existence, while others were specially mounted for 1951.

The lasting imagery of the South Bank exhibition, the Dome of discovery and the Skylon, the struts and wires, the abstract 'atomic' designs and the fabric patterns derived from crystals, suggest that the Festival of Britain was a little more forward-looking than it really was. The theme was 'the Land and the People',<sup>7</sup> comfortably democratic words that created a space within which to explore the way a nation had shaped its environment and been shaped by it. The emphasis was on 'the arts of peace',<sup>8</sup> imperial echoes sounding only in the celebration of British explorers in the Dome of Discovery.

The modernist, technological vision promoted by the South Bank was diluted by an indigenous neo-romanticism that had flourished during the war. The artists brought in to decorate the site, among them Graham Sutherland, Henry Moore and John Piper, tended to add a biomorphic or vegetable overlay which softened the designers' abstractions. The site was too cramped for any imposing architectural master plan; the English picturesque, barely under control in the Lion and Unicorn pavilion dedicated to the British character, ran riot in the Battersea Pleasure Gardens. There John Piper and Osbert Lancaster's Grand Vista, and Rowland Emmett's Far Tottering and Oyster Creek Railway, offered a comic alternative to the modernist styling favoured by the Council of Industrial Design.

The celebration of national identity – which was sufficiently self-conscious to suggest an uncertainty about the durability of that identity – was highlighted as the Festival's theme in the sermon given by Archbishop Fisher at the opening service of dedication. 'The chief and governing purpose of the Festival is to declare our belief in the British way of life . . . It is good at a time like the present

<sup>7</sup> Introduction to the *Official Guide to the South Bank Exhibition*, reproduced in M. Banham and B. Hillier, eds, *op. cit.*, 74–5.

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*

so to strengthen, and in part to recover our hold on all that is best in our national life'.<sup>9</sup> The parenthetical 'and in part to recover' suggests that that hold was not as secure as people would wish. The 'dangers and anxieties'<sup>10</sup> besetting Britain which the Chairman of the Arts Council Sir Ernest Pooley hinted at in his introduction to the Council's report covering the Festival were real enough. There had been a long term economic crisis since 1947, compounded by the need for a massive rearmament programme following the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950. The conflict brought with it the very real threat of a third world war involving atomic weapons. The need to pay for rearmament had caused the Labour Government to abrogate the principle of a completely free National Health Service, provoking resignations which weakened it in the run up to the 1951 General Election. All in all, the Festival of Britain did not take place in the political and economic climate it had been planned for: for that matter, it also rained a great deal in the summer of 1951.

Yet the Festival was undoubtedly a popular success. Herbert Morrison had wanted 'to see the people happy. I want to hear them sing'<sup>11</sup> and by all accounts the break from austerity was welcomed. The Festival was mounted in a remarkably short time, in the face of considerable difficulties. It had had to be about that keyword of the post-war period, *planning*. The masterminds were young architects and designers; many people working on the Festival had seen war service, and the combination of military and design skills met in the complex art of logistics that on opening day had the painters and cleaners leaving by the exit just as the first visitors entered by the turnstiles. When you recall that the Festival's service of dedication ended with the hymn 'Jerusalem', it is tempting, in retrospect, to see the Festival as one little bit of the Welfare State that worked.

Yet if we are to consider the Festival of Britain as a particular manifestation of post-war culture, we must see that culture for what it was. In 1963 Michael Frayn published a brilliant essay on the Festival which argued that it was not the beginning of anything, rather the end of the period when a certain social group had held sway. These were 'the radical middle-classes – the do-gooders; the readers of the *News Chronicle*, the *Guardian*, and the *Observer*, the signers of petitions; the backbone of the BBC. In short, the Herbivores or gentle ruminants.'<sup>12</sup> The tone of the Festival, wrote Frayn, was 'philanthropic, kindly, whimsical, cosy, optimistic, middlebrow, deeply instinct with the Herbivorous philosophy so shortly doomed to eclipse'.<sup>13</sup> That eclipse was to be brought about by the Carnivores, 'the upper- and middle-classes who believe that if God had not wished them to prey on all smaller and weaker creatures without

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual Report 1950/51*.

<sup>11</sup> B. Donoghue and G.W. Jones, *op. cit.*, 323.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Frayn, 'Festival' in *Age of Austerity*, ed. Michael Sissons and Philip French (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963), 319.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

scruple, he would not have made them as they are'.<sup>14</sup> Frayn was writing of the 1950s; the Carnivores have ruled the earth with even greater ferocity since then.

Frayn's point is that although the Festival celebrated 'the Land and the People' the people, for the most part, and certainly the working-class, had little say in how they were celebrated. In so far as the Festival had any socialist colouring, it was socialism of a distinctly Fabian kind. Reyner Banham describes the Festival as being run by 'kindly ex-officers and gentlemen'<sup>15</sup> and the principal beneficiaries of the state's patronage were not so much the individual artists who received commissions, as the institutions through which Festival funds were channeled. This is especially true of the Arts Council, given direct responsibility for the cultural programme, and an extra £400,000 by the Treasury. This show of confidence in the Arts Council seems in turn to have given the Council confidence to go beyond its then fairly hesitant practice of giving small subsidies and guarantees against loss, and to commission work for the first time.

Given Benjamin Britten's growing reputation it is not surprising that he should have been one of the favoured artists. (Vaughan Williams declined the offer of a commission, George Lloyd was commissioned to write *John Socman* for the Carl Rosa Company, and there were four further opera scores commissioned following a competition.<sup>16</sup>) The English Opera Group had been receiving £3000 a year since 1947; the commission for *Billy Budd* was agreed in 1949. The question of suitability of an all-male opera and the change of proposed production house from Sadler's Wells to Covent Garden need not detain us here. The Arts Council's report noted dryly that 'it was perhaps unfortunate that circumstances made it impossible for this opera . . . to be played during the Festival season; but the production, when it came, was hailed as being an excellent one.'<sup>17</sup> Britten was further honoured with a special season at the Lyric Hammersmith by the English Opera Group, although financially this was not a great success.

In general the musical events arranged by the Arts Council were well-received, but the Festival drama was neither particularly distinguished nor, thanks to professional rivalries, well organized. But the Arts Council itself emerged with credit, and indeed a small financial surplus. It was also by now a far less radical body than its wartime predecessor CEMA had been. If there ever had been any question that 'the arts' were to be defined as those professional activities sanctioned and encouraged by the Arts Council, or that institutions like the Royal Opera House were the most appropriate recipients of funds, that question was closed in 1951. In that year the Council appointed a new Secretary-General, W.E. Williams, who concluded that, although the Council had a double duty to 'raise and spread' the standards and appreciation of the arts, the Council could not afford to broaden its activities. 'If an emphasis must

<sup>14</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> In M. Banham and B. Hillier, eds, *op. cit.*, 197.

<sup>16</sup> None was performed as part of the Festival. See below, p. 51, fn. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual Report 1951/52*, 38.



be placed somewhere in that motto of 'Raise and Spread' it seems wiser and more realistic to concentrate on Raise.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the genuinely popular appeal of the Festival of Britain to a wide section of the population, its organizers, like their counterparts in the Arts Council, or for that matter in the BBC, who had launched the Third Programme in 1946, shared the assumptions of their time. They saw their cultural landscape in terms of a high ridge of artistic achievement towering above a middleground of average endeavour, which fell away to the lowlands of popular pursuits. These lower reaches of recreation were menaced by invaders from across the sea: the bearers of crass American entertainment. 'Culture' – with a capital 'C' – was what it had been even before Matthew Arnold's day, not just the alternative to Anarchy, but a defense against the corruptions of industrialization and the mass society that threatened to blot out all sweetness and light. Yet if culture was the pursuit of the enlightened minority, by the 1950s it was firmly in the realm of public policy. The need to organize societies for the massive efforts required of them in wartime – ironically, to defend cultural values – made culture the responsibility of governments dedicated to the management of industrialism for the benefit of mass society.

The recognition that these changes had made culture a matter for institutions – be they the Arts Council or UNESCO – was one of the motives for T.S. Eliot to publish his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* in 1948. It is a scrappy little book, made up of essays and broadcasts that go back to 1943, but it made an impression, partly because Eliot was then at the height of his reputation – he was awarded the Order of Merit and won the Nobel Prize that year – and partly because it was, as far as I know, the only book to raise the theoretical issues involved at that time. It may also have made an impression because it was so hostile to the way things appeared to be going.

Eliot is concerned that culture should have become a matter of state concern. While claiming to do no more than ask what the word 'culture' might mean – answering that it is 'the creation of the society as a whole'<sup>19</sup> – he raises objections (with a distinctly cold-war anti-Russian inflection) to the Welfare State notion that culture can be planned, and argues that contemporary plans, in terms of the creation of state institutions and educational policy, will be damaging to the organic, hierarchical culture which he discerns and defines as 'the creation of society as a whole'. If the landscape metaphor used earlier appears at all far-fetched, it is less so than Eliot's claim that the 'headlong rush to educate everybody' has been 'destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanized caravans'.<sup>20</sup> (Do we see here Matthew Arnold's Dover Beach becoming a caravan site?) Eliot positively fears a classless society, arguing that it is good for the culture of society as a whole that the culture of the minority and the elite should remain qualitatively distinct, and that no conscious effort

<sup>18</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual Report 1952/53: The Public and the Arts*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 37.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.