

*Peter Warlock in Montgomeryshire**

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Having had the privilege of chairing the June Gruffydd Memorial Lecture twice, I am honoured to deliver the Lecture itself this year. I knew June all too briefly, and remember her, and the encouragement she showed my earliest research on Morfydd Owen, with gratitude and affection.

I have been fortunate to work on many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British musicians, but Peter Warlock is the composer who has mattered longest in my life. My first memory of making specific music dates from when I was about seven years of age and I sang, during one of Newtown and District Choral Society's annual Christmas concerts, directed by my mother Jayne Davies in St David's Church, the *Three Carols* written by Warlock in 1923 and dedicated by the composer to Ralph Vaughan Williams and the London Bach Choir. I can still project myself back into that moment and remember how the rhythm and energy of that music really thrilled me. Some years later, I would also come to realise that the carols had been composed in a house called Cefn Bryntalch, just up the road from Newtown.

Peter Warlock was a complex man: a misfit, loner, womaniser, drunkard and drug-taker. But he was also one of the most facilely-gifted people ever to work in British music: a man of prodigious and varied abilities who is still renowned as an author, commentator and pioneering editor of what is now termed early music, as well as an innovative and individual composer, particularly of songs and choral works. Pen portraits of Warlock abound in the autobiographies of major figures in contemporary British culture: Nina Hamnett, the Sitwells, Lady Ottoline Morrell. They evoke a truly extraordinary and dashing being with boundless charisma and a caustic wit, who would break into impromptu performances of Cossack dancing on railway stations, leap from moving buses in pursuit of the perfect cat, or indulge his penchant for motor-biking in the nude. Hardly surprising, then, that many novelists have sought to distil something of Warlock into fiction, including Aldous Huxley, Anthony Powell and the Canadian-born writer with strong Montgomeryshire connections, Robertson Davies.

There are three subjects on which one must touch in any talk about Peter Warlock. First, for those who may not know, Warlock was not his real name. He was born Philip Arnold Heseltine but always had a predilection for fantastical pseudonyms such as Prosdocius de Beldamandis and Huanebango Z. Palimpsest. Rab Noolas – 'Saloon Bar' backwards, in the manner of Dylan

* The June Gruffydd Memorial Lecture addressed to a joint meeting of the Cymmrodorion and the Montgomeryshire Society at the British Academy, 14 February 2007. The original presentation included visual and musical illustrations.

Thomas's Llareggub – also enjoyed a vogue, but it was Warlock which stuck. Second, there is the matter of his tragic death in a gas-filled basement flat in Chelsea, aged only thirty-six, on which an open verdict was recorded by the inquest jury, but which remains the subject of speculation, from accident to cry-for-help to suicide to murder. And third, there is the Warlock legend, which stems largely from the three-year period when he rented a cottage at Eynsford, Kent, from 1925. The 'wine, women and song' tag is still good for publicity, but the person who really interests me as an historian is not the construct Peter Warlock but the man himself, Philip Heseltine. I am therefore going to concentrate on the composer's formative years, when it will be more accurate to refer to him as Heseltine in the main, rather than Warlock; and to examine his family background in Montgomeryshire as well as his Celtic pilgrimage to Cornwall, Ireland and Brittany. Many creative artists sought inspiration from the Celtic world at the turn of the twentieth century, including the composers Granville Bantock, E. J. Moeran, Joseph Holbrooke and Arnold Bax, but none, not even Bax, appears to have immersed himself in his subject so broadly.

If we sharpen the focus to consider music-making in Montgomeryshire in particular, the names of executants such as the soprano Elizabeth Vaughan, the oboist David Theodore and the violist Tony Jenkins spring rather more readily to mind than those of the county's composers. But think of the Mills family of Llanidloes, who wrote and published hymn-tunes alongside their musical grammars. Think of Morfydd Owen herself – born and brought up in Treforest, yes, but several of whose compositions reflect visits to her father's family home in Llanbrynmair. Think of Thomas and Richard Maldwyn Price, also of Llanbrynmair. Thomas, the father, provided a number of choral test pieces for the National Eisteddfod, while his son Richard, the first student to be awarded a doctorate in music by the University of Wales, was hailed by Henry Walford Davies as 'the Welsh Schubert'. Think of Henry Balfour Gardiner, uncle of the conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner, who was billeted in Kerry towards the end of the Great War as an interpreter for German prisoners. And think of Gregynog, where Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Ian Parrott, William Mathias and others stayed and wrote and premièred their compositions at the invitation of Gwendoline and Margaret Davies. All this, I hope, is worthy of interest and reflection, but the most sustainedly significant example of composition inspired by and produced in Montgomeryshire was the music written by Peter Warlock when he was largely resident in the county between 1921 and 1924. 'Wild Wales alone holds an enchantment for me stronger than wine or women,' he wrote in November 1921, 'and intimately associated with music. In these admirable and tranquil surroundings I can work more quietly and steadily than I have ever been able to before.'¹

Heseltine's Celtic odyssey began quite by chance. All his forebears were model end-of-empire citizens: stockbrokers, landowners and art collectors on his father's side of the family and doctors and civil servants on his mother's.

¹ Philip Heseltine to Cecil Gray, 19 November 1921.

Charles Covernton, his maternal grandfather, was brought up in Canada but, after an early career as a shipboard doctor, including a spell in the Crimea with Florence Nightingale, he settled his family in the Radnorshire town of Knighton. Covernton and his wife Jane lived in Wylcwm Street, near St Edward's Church. Heseltine's mother was the eldest of their seven children and, although she was born in Southampton, her parents moved to Knighton when she was just four months old. Her full name was Bessie Mary Edith Covernton, but she was known all her life as 'Covie', a nickname which may even be seen on her grave in Llandyssil churchyard. Following her mother's premature death, Covie ran her father's household from the age of fourteen and this may well account for her being remembered in adult life as rather a formidable person. She was brisk, she was organised – in today's parlance one might well say driven – and Jack Moeran, one of her son's composer friends, described her as the most domineering woman he ever met. But there are many facets to a personality and more than one side to a story. In Llandyssil, Covie is still remembered with gratitude and affection for acts of generosity and kindness within the village, and even though no family members live in the area now, you rarely pass her grave and see it without flowers.

Covie married a London solicitor, Arnold Heseltine, and Philip, their only child, was born at the Savoy Hotel in 1894, although he always preferred to say that he had been born on the Thames Embankment. The boy's father died of cancer when he was just two and a half and Covie re-cemented her mid-Wales connections in 1903 by marrying Walter Buckley Jones, eldest son and heir of the estate known as Cefn Bryntalch between Abermule and Llandyssil in Montgomeryshire. It is not clear how Walter met Covie, or why he decided to commit to this 43-year-old widow and her eight-year-old son, but marry they did, setting up home at 27 Hans Road, the Knightsbridge house which Covie had shared previously with Arnold Heseltine, before moving to Bryntalch around 1908 when Harrods procured No. 27 and other properties in the row for warehousing. Indeed, if you visit Harrods' food hall today, you will be standing on the site of the composer's first home.

And so the fourteen-year-old Heseltine exchanged what remains one of London's smartest addresses for Newtown, my home town in Montgomeryshire, and the sort of place where people still drove cattle in the streets. Newtown was where Walter's forebears had secured the family fortune through sheep-farming and flannel, allied industries which, during the nineteenth century, transformed a medieval market town into the 'busy Leeds of Wales'. Richard Jones, Walter's paternal grandfather, came of a Mochdre family which, by the 1840s, ran a flourishing drapery where Cross Chambers stand today. He sent his son Richard Edward Jones for a lawyer's training in London, but he never practised, responding to his father's wish that he return to Newtown and devote himself to public service. R. E. Jones was 60 years a county magistrate and High Sheriff for Montgomeryshire in 1875. His wife Catharine was a daughter of John Buckley Williames, squire of Pennant, Glanhafren and Glyncogan, and the

couple's own lavish seat, Cefn Bryntalch, some five miles east of Newtown, was completed in 1869.

Cefn Bryntalch occupies a beautiful position on a crown of land four hundred feet high rising over the Severn valley. Jones selected the ecclesiastical architect George Frederick Bodley to design his house: an imposing, red-brick property in Queen Anne style. It is one of only two domestic commissions which Bodley undertook, and the extensive grounds were laid out by the equally noted landscape architect, Philip Webb. Some of Bodley's original plans have recently come to light and go into precise detail about the materials to be used, the colourways, and the names of the craftsmen engaged as plumbers and carpenters. The house stands diagonally across the Severn valley from Pennant and it is said that Jones insisted on having it built at a certain angle so that the sun would strike his windows, reflect back to blind his in-laws, and show them just what the money of a self-made man could achieve [see Fig. 1]. Certainly no expense was spared. Census returns reveal that, at the height of its splendour in the 1880s, the Cefn Bryntalch household comprised twenty-two servants including a governess from Hamburg. £20,000 is reported to have been spent on constructing the drive, while meat to feed the family and their retainers arrived at the kitchen in washing-baskets. Fig. 2 shows the handsome gabled façade, including at bottom right, the drawing-room window, overcanopied with wisteria, where Warlock would later compose; the main entrance is to the side, beneath the bell tower.

Philip Heseltine's first visits to Bryntalch were intermittent during vacations from Eton College, but Wales and the Welsh language quickly exerted an inexorable fascination. His step-family spoke English, of course, like all Marcher gentry, but he made a point of learning the tenantry's Welsh. 'My darling mother,' he wrote from Eton in 1910, 'I have quite made up my mind to learn Welsh; I can learn the grammar ... by myself, I think, and then get a Welshman to give me a few lessons when I have mastered the rudiments.'² Philip urged his mother to look out a Welsh-language Bible because 'a Bible is a great help to the learner of any language.'³ As it happened, the Bryntalch library contained a range of sources for the emergent Celtic scholar. Heseltine pored over sundial inscriptions in Manx, and read widely on the history, literature and folklore of Wales: Owain Glyndŵr, Dafydd ap Gwilym, Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the *Mabinogi*, Giraldus Cambrensis and George Borrow. He enthused in 1911:

Borrow's glorious work *Wild Wales* . . . is one of my most treasured possessions, which I have always by me, and read constantly over and over again. It is wonderful how Borrow

² P. Heseltine to Edith Buckley Jones, 5 June 1910.

³ Ibid.

caught the spirit of that heavenly country, and described it in such a delightful style! I simply adore Wales and never tire of such a delicious picture of it!⁴

Wild Wales soon inspired extensive tours on foot and by motor-bike. Philip thought nothing of hiking fifty or sixty miles a day, dossing down overnight as he went, from Aran Fawddwy and Lake Vyrnwy in the north to Lampeter, Abbey Cwmhir and the Golden Valley in the south. His letters are remarkable for their lyrical descriptions of ‘all the wild loveliness of mid Wales,’⁵ as he put it: her hills, moors, mists, snows, twilights, birds and blossom. ‘To see our part of Wales properly [i.e. mid-Wales],’ Heseltine enthused to the composer Frederick Delius in 1912, ‘one must walk over the wild hills and moors, where there are no roads and scarcely any other human beings.’⁶ And again to his mother, ‘My most beautiful recollections of sights [are] all centred in Wales. I get more and more fond of Wales the more I read and see of it; and I enjoy recollections of lovely scenery almost as much as the thing itself.’⁷

Heseltine was always proud that his first published article was a piece about the Van Railway which appeared in *The Locomotive Magazine*, one illustration showing the author conducting research on location by a derelict carriage. Heseltine had access to Welsh folk music, too, lobbying successfully for *Ar hyd y nos* (‘All through the night’) and *Llwyn Onn* (‘The Ash Grove’) to be programmed at school concerts, and basing one of his five surviving *Folk-Song Preludes* for piano on *Tros y garreg* (‘Over the stone’). Colin Taylor, the boy’s music master at Eton, recorded his recollections of the period during his retirement in South Africa:

When Heseltine came to Eton in 1908 at the age of 14, I was 27 and had already been an assistant music master at the College for four years . . . A colleague of mine, the ’cellist Edward Mason, fresh from an orchestral rehearsal in London, came to our Music School in great excitement. In a composer whose name was then unknown to me, he had found the greatest, the most original, the most enchanting of all moderns. The name, destined later to have a profound and lasting influence on Philip Heseltine, was that of Frederick Delius.

And thus it came about that I was cast for the rôle to be the first to introduce Heseltine to Delius the composer – the actual work, the part-song *On Craig Ddu*, I believe – while shortly afterwards, it was Heseltine’s rôle to introduce me to Delius the man.

⁴ P. Heseltine to Frederick Delius, 10 December 1911.

⁵ P. Heseltine to Delius, 25 November 1911.

⁶ P. Heseltine to Delius, 4 August 1912.

⁷ P. Heseltine to E. Buckley Jones, 14 November 1909.

It was not long before the burning question of Heseltine's career exercised the minds of Mr and Mrs Buckley Jones, the boy's mother and stepfather [see fig. 3]. Music, of course, was absolutely ruled out:

'When appealed to, Mamma, hoping I would side with the family, would say, "Oh, dear Mr Taylor, you have such great influence. Cannot you make Phil to see reason? He will listen to you." This was all very well, but as my sympathies were entirely with the boy, I had to say so. My stock fell to an all-time low.'⁸

Many Montgomeryshire people believe that Delius came to the county and played the organ at Llandyssil Church. I almost hate to demolish the myth, but there is no proof to support it, despite a stream of invitations from Heseltine over many years which dropped the heaviest possible hints by enclosing intricate details of train times to Abermule with connections from Paris or Bradford or wherever else Delius happened to be. 'I really think you would like Wales,' he wrote again in 1911, 'and, I hope, find the Welsh people more attractive than the English! They are *quite* different.'⁹

After rejecting several conventional career paths, including the Civil Service and a place in the Heseltine family stockbroking firm, as his mother really wanted, Philip dropped out of two degree courses at Christ Church, Oxford, and University College, London, to launch a precarious musical career as concert critic to the *Daily Mail*. A photograph taken outside a London restaurant shows him with the sculptor Jacob Epstein and Evan Morgan, later Viscount Tredegar; and it was Epstein who introduced Heseltine to the Dutch composer Bernard van Dieren at the Café Royal on Piccadilly. Van Dieren remains a mysterious and rather sinister figure, for Philip appears to have been completely in his thrall, addressing him as 'the Master' and arranging concerts to promote the Dutchman's music, including one, rather disastrously, at the Wigmore Hall, when box-office receipts totalled £5 against outgoings of £200. Another guru was the novelist D. H. Lawrence, with whom Heseltine moved into a house at Porthcothan, beyond Padstow on the Cornish coast, in January 1916. Lawrence's novel *The Rainbow* had just been banned and it was from Porthcothan, using Cefn Bryntalch as a forwarding address, that Heseltine issued a manifesto seeking subscribers to republish it. The scheme was unsuccessful and, when he learned that Lawrence was satirising him and his girlfriend Minnie Lucy Channing, an exotic model nicknamed variously 'Bobbie' or 'Puma', in his next novel, *Women in Love*, this did little for relations between them either.

⁸ Colin Taylor in conversation with Barry Smith, 15 February 1967, author's collection.

⁹ P. Heseltine to Delius, 25 November 1911. On the relationship between Heseltine and Delius, see B. Smith, *Frederick Delius and Peter Warlock: A Friendship Revealed* (Oxford and New York, 2000).

The glamorous Puma sat to a number of leading artists including Epstein, Augustus John and Eric Gill and visited Cefn Bryntalch on several occasions. She and Heseltine married in December 1916, but their relationship was always volatile to say the least, and, when Philip returned to Cornwall in April 1917, he returned alone. Still only 22, he rented a bungalow above Zennor, near St Ives, and immersed himself in the study of Cornish to overwrite the memory of an unmanageable wife and an unwanted child, farmed out to its grandparents in Wales. Nigel Heseltine, Warlock's son, was brought up by Covie and Walter from the age of about eighteen months. He was long understood to have been the child of Warlock and Puma, but his book, *Capriol for Mother*, makes a number of startling suggestions about family matters, including the suggestion that his mother may have been an unnamed Swiss woman.

In Zennor, Heseltine became charmed by Cornish because it was virtually extinct: 'The Cornish language should be revived – nay, is being revived, for am I not myself reviving it? . . . to have a private language! What a luxury!' ¹⁰ Pol Hodge, the Truro poet who is in the vanguard of today's resurgence of the language, considers it 'remarkable indeed' ¹¹ that Heseltine could have known anything of Cornish in 1917, given that there was only one textbook available, *A Handbook of the Cornish Language* by Henry Jenner, or 'Gwas Mighal', first Grand Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd. Even more remarkable was that Heseltine made choral settings of two carols by Jenner: 'probably the first time,' as the composer himself remarked, that 'the old language has ever been musicked deliberately.' ¹²

In August 1917, and with the threat of conscription mounting – his exemption three years previously from active service in the Great War had, after all, been founded on the rather flimsy premise that he was unable to micturate in public – Heseltine moved to Dublin. He socialised at the United Arts Club with George Russell (A.E.) and W. B. Yeats, and transcribed William Ballet's book of lute and viol manuscripts in Trinity College Library, an apprenticeship which laid a solid foundation for his distinguished career as a scholar of Elizabethan and Jacobean music. Not that Heseltine was dazzled, as zealous converts can be, by everything his temporary homeland had to offer. 'Ireland and Wales, the two countries which are always boasting of their national musical abilities,' he sniped to Colin Taylor, 'are the very countries in which one finds the most complete absence of any sort of taste and discrimination.' ¹³

Philip Heseltine spent the first two months of 1918 away from Dublin, although, until I was commissioned to make *Dewin Cerdd*, a documentary about the composer's Celtic connections for S4C, it was never clear where. For Heseltine, normally scrupulous about adding dates and locations to letters and manuscripts, was deliberately secretive about his west of Ireland retreat. Cecil

¹⁰ P. Heseltine to Cecil Gray, 25 March 1918.

¹¹ Pol Hodge in conversation with the author on the television programme *Peter Warlock: Dewin Cerdd*, S4C, 1998, author's translation.

¹² P. Heseltine to Gray, 7 April 1918.

¹³ P. Heseltine to Colin Taylor, 19 July 1918.

Gray hazarded a guess at Achill or the Aran Islands, but the actual location was Achill Beg, a 360-acre island just south of Achill itself, where he lodged with the local schoolmaster, Francis Power. Power, usually known by his Irish nickname 'An Paorach' ('The Power'), was an exceptional host and mentor. Of Irish and Scottish descent but brought up in an English-speaking home in Plymouth, he, like Heseltine, experienced a moment of awakening and transformation when he chanced upon a copy of an Irish grammar in the library of a Jesuit college in Spain. An Paorach absconded from the college to found Scoil Acla in Co. Mayo, a summer school to foster Irish language and culture and to teach Irish to the people of Achill Beg. His pioneering work attracted the attention of Douglas Hyde, president of the Gaelic League. Indeed, by the time Heseltine met him, the Hibernian superhero had become a household name. 'Every Gael has heard of An Paorach,' proclaimed the contemporary press, 'He is the delight of Irish Ireland from one end of Ireland to the other.'¹⁴ Heseltine came to speak Irish with considerable fluency, describing the process as 'a fascinating study and, apart from its intrinsic value, a wonderful mental athletic.'¹⁵ An inscription in An Paorach's copy of Gray's biography of the composer confirms Heseltine's interest: 'He stayed with me on Achill Beg and learned Irish and Cornish.'¹⁶

Philip Heseltine's Welsh, Cornish and Irish notebooks contain fastidious lists of vocabulary and mutations. But increasingly, jumbled among the linguistic jottings, come clues to more arcane interests: palmistry and astrology, hypnotism and the chakras, the tarot, witchcraft, and magic. Heseltine's excursions into the esoteric appear to have formed part of an elaborate attempt to evolve a creative philosophy and a conduit or mechanism for composition. He considered studying formally, with Holst among others, but nothing ever came of it, and a recurrent theme in his correspondence is the very real fear that he would always be a flawed composer because he had begun as a critic. This quotation from Paracelsus is instructive: 'I began to study my art by imagining that there was not a single teacher in the world capable to teach it to me, but that I had to acquire it myself.'¹⁷ He borrows elsewhere from Oscar Wilde: 'To arrive at what one really believes, one must speak through lips different from one's own.'¹⁸ Finally, in another letter to Colin Taylor, Heseltine's manifesto emerges in full:

Since all music, all art of any kind that is of any value, must be sought and found in that inner kingdom and there alone, it is only reasonable that we should try and acquire some knowledge of its geography. . . . I have realized – painfully in myself – that no one can hope even to understand the messages of an art, much less to

¹⁴ Unidentified press cutting, undated, author's collection.

¹⁵ P. Heseltine to Bernard van Dieren, 18 February 1918.

¹⁶ Private collection, author's translation.

¹⁷ British Library Add. MS 57968E, f. 11b.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 26b.

create anything of any value . . . until his real self with all its potentialities has been drawn out of its slumber into consciousness . . . The secret of art is 'Know Thyself.'¹⁹

On returning to Dublin from Achill Beg, Heseltine felt 'electric',²⁰ but was quite unable to compose. 'I cannot write a note of music,' he fretted in June 1918, 'I am utterly dessicated.'²¹ He started favouring a magical monogram and cultivated an unruly beard, or 'fungus'²² as he called it, grown expressly for its talismanic properties. 'It is necessary for me to make use of any little magical energy-saving devices that suggest themselves,' he confided in Taylor, 'and this is one of them.'²³ A significant influence in Dublin was Hester Dowden, a lapsed concert pianist, who allowed Philip to use the Steinway at her home in Fitzwilliam Square. Hester was a renowned medium and automatist and Heseltine appears to have broken through his writer's block by means of his own experimentation with automatic writing and the ouija board, writing ten songs in a fortnight in August 1918. These songs, Philip Heseltine's first published compositions, were issued by the firm of Winthrop Rogers under the pen-name 'Peter Warlock'. Warlock is another word for a male witch, of course, and, while there is no concrete proof that occult study influenced his choice of name – the composer maintained that he borrowed it from a sampler in an antique-shop window – a magus is depicted on every front cover.

The years 1919-21 were dominated by Warlock's editorship of *The Sackbut* and, when the magazine failed, by several months of madcap travel through north Africa and Europe. Warlock's jaunt into the Sahara replicated an earlier journey undertaken by Aleister Crowley and his disciple Victor Neuburg; and it was during this same period that the novelist Mary Butts remembered being initiated by Warlock into magic. Warlock's arrival in France in June 1921 was a springboard to yet more Celtic study in Brittany. 'I have been staying here... for some weeks, working very hard,' he wrote to Cecil Gray from Camaret, near Finistère. 'Tomorrow I am going down the coast to . . . Carnac, the mystical centre of the Celtic world.'²⁴ Warlock did reach Carnac and began a Breton notebook with jottings about syntax and details of a *Dictionnaire français-breton*. Who knows what he had in mind, or what might have transpired? But he ran out of money in Paris on the way back and that was the end of the odyssey. The only consolation for being bailed home in ignominious disgrace by his mother was a chance to base himself at Cefn Bryntalch and revel in the serene Montgomeryshire scenery once more. His uncle Joseph Heseltine wrote from France, 'You seem to have made a most dreadful mess of everything, but it is lucky you have that beautiful place in Wales to retire to.'²⁵

¹⁹ P. Heseltine to Taylor, 27 September 1917.

²⁰ Heseltine to Taylor, 25 April 1918.

²¹ Heseltine to Taylor, 13 June 1918.

²² Heseltine to Taylor, 19 July 1918.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ P. Heseltine to Gray, 21 June 1921.

²⁵ Joseph Heseltine to P. Heseltine, 2 November 1921.

Peter Warlock achieved the most settled period of his life and his finest music and musical scholarship as a result of his mother's disciplined hospitality at Cefn Bryntalch between 1921-24 [see figs. 4 and 5]. When she had no need of her drawing-room to entertain members of the county set to afternoon tea, Covie allowed her composer son to sit at the Broadwood grand piano by 'a pleasant window overlooking some twenty miles of Welsh hills'²⁶ and write and write and write. How he managed to concentrate, I really do not know, for his daughter-in-law, Natalia Heseltine, told me that the room was incredibly cluttered and she once counted 23 occasional tables there, quite apart from the knick-knacks on top! As Philip Heseltine, and sometimes as 'Cambrensis', he also continued to place music journalism, including a trenchant piece in the *Weekly Westminster Gazette* which reached a peroration in demolishing 'the old shibboleth that the Welsh are a musical nation':

The nationality fetish dominates Welsh music to a ridiculous extent, and we are sometimes asked to believe that music can be good in Wales and bad anywhere else. This deliberate attitude of isolation from the contemporary musical movements in other countries is no doubt a partial cause of the utter stagnation of musical life in Wales.²⁷

Warlock's Cefn Bryntalch compositions include *The Curlew*, an extended setting of poetry by Yeats for tenor and instrumental sextet, which is generally acknowledged as his masterpiece; *Lillygay*; both groups of *Peterisms*; and some of his single songs of finest calibre including *Late Summer* and *Sleep*. He also completed the first major biography of Delius (*Frederick Delius*, 1923), the *Serenade for Strings* as a sixtieth birthday present for his mentor, and transcriptions of over three hundred Elizabethan and Jacobean airs. And although he denigrated them as 'crude, pot-boiling songs',²⁸ Warlock's heartiest and most popular compositions were written in Montgomeryshire, too: *Good Ale*, and the 'Two True Toper's Tunes to Trill with Trulls and Trollops in a Tavern', *Captain Stratton's Fancy* (subtitled 'Rum') and *Mr Belloc's Fancy* (subtitled 'Beer'). These surely reflect sessions at local watering holes such as Llandyssil's Upper House Inn, The Anchor, and The Lion (formerly Stanhope's) at Caerhowel.

It is now my lamentable task to chronicle two cautionary tales involving residents of Montgomeryshire and the evils of drink. Warlock had sometimes to stand in for the organist of Llandyssil Church, George Wroughton, if he could not be roused to play for Sunday service the morning after too heavy a night before [see fig. 6]. 'Last Sunday,' Warlock wrote to Cecil Gray in 1921:

²⁶ P. Heseltine to van Dieren, 24 January 1920.

²⁷ P[hilip] H[eseltine], 'Music', *The Weekly Westminster Gazette*, II, 84.

²⁸ P. Heseltine to Fritz Hart, 7 February 1922.

in response to a sudden and urgent request . . . I attended divine service, for the first time in many years, and – in the language of provincial reporting – ‘presided at the grand organ,’ fully arrayed in cassock and surplice, to say nothing of the beard which of course has become quite profuse during my rustication! During the Communion Service in E flat by Mr Caleb Simper(!) I discovered three pedals each of which, when depressed, shot out half a dozen stops, whose names were quite unintelligible to me, with a roar, or shot them in again with a sound like an expiring bagpipe . . . However the strange sounds I produced were nothing compared with the caterwauling they were supposed to accompany – and I received the congratulations of the parish on my beautiful performance.²⁹

Not that the composer was a teetotaler. His recessional voluntary at Llandyssil took the form of an improvisation on *Tôn-y-Botel*, just to rub it in regarding Mr Wroughton. According to his son Nigel, Warlock also frequented the Montgomery home of the notoriously bibulous Dr Richard Game Phillips and his flame-haired Irish wife, Eileen. Game by name and more than game by nature, Dr Phillips ran his medical practice from the octagonal governor’s residence at Montgomery’s second county gaol, where he kept a goat in the former condemned cell and an anatomical skeleton hanging from the ceiling above. His idea of a good way to spend Saturday nights was to feign suicide by discharging his gun in the garden, until Mrs Phillips hollered that he had been dead quite long enough and ordered him back inside.

The most outrageous incident concerning Warlock and Dr Phillips took place in 1924. The composer was despatched to collect a case of whisky for his stepfather Walter from Montgomery Station but made the mistake of looking in at the gaol on the return journey, where he remained holed up for three days with the doctor and the liquor. Finally emerging for a breath of air on Castle Rock [see fig. 7], Warlock plunged twenty feet over the battlements and had to be restored to Cefn Bryntalch by Dr Phillips and an entire medical support team. Nigel Heseltine, then aged seven, ‘was lurking in the hall when Philip was brought back in an ambulance; but my grandmother’s alarm soon changed to horror as Dr Phillips leaped out of the driver’s seat. “Don’t worry, ma’am!” he shouted. “He thought he could fly, that’s all!”’³⁰ A fleeting reference in the convalescent’s contemporary correspondence confirms: ‘I am at present laid up with a broken leg – result of a too too Dionysian prance down the steep slopes of Montgomery Castle.’³¹

²⁹ Heseltine to Gray, 19 November 1921.

³⁰ N. Heseltine, *Capriol for Mother* (London, 1992), 155.

³¹ P. Heseltine to van Dieren, 22 April 1924.

Warlock entertained several distinguished visitors at Cefn Bryntalch, including Arthur Symons, whose poetry inspired *Autumn Twilight*. But his most extraordinary house-guest was the Hungarian composer-pianist Béla Bartók. Warlock and Bartók had met in Budapest in 1921 and, following a recital in London in March 1922, Bartók made his way to another engagement in Aberystwyth. He was charmed by the town, as postcards to his mother, aunt and sister, commending Constitution Hill and the wild rocky seashore, reveal. The weather was also good for Aberystwyth in March – not a cloud in the sky and marvellously sunny – and Bartók strolled with a Hungarian lecturer from the Mathematics Department of the University before giving the weekly College Concert in Parish Hall. The *Cambrian News* struggled to convey a sense of Bartók's idiom: 'though its meaning and message was somewhat obscured to the uninitiated, it gave a glimpse of hitherto undreamt of possibilities.'³² Even Walford Davies, Aberystwyth's Professor of Music, was overheard to remark, 'Baffling, isn't it?'³³ As to Bartók, what flabbergasted him was the fee of £15 when £2 paid a year's rent in Hungary.

Warlock planned to attend the concert, but cabled to apologise that he was unavoidably detained in London and arranged to collect Bartók next morning from Newtown Station. It never fails to amaze me as I sit there waiting for trains myself that Bartók once alighted on the same platform, but the telegram survives in the National Library of Wales to confirm it. Bartók stayed at Bryntalch for a couple of days and Nigel Heseltine recalled how the family, like the good people of Aberystwyth, 'observed the small determined man with the foreign accent, and listened with incomprehension to the concert he gave us on the drawing-room piano after dinner.'³⁴ Warlock reciprocated by treating Bartók to a ride in his motor-bike and sidecar. Where they went is not recorded, nor how they extricated themselves from the predicament of breaking down, but two places they may have visited were among Warlock's favourites in mid Wales: the remote lake Bugeilyn, beyond Dylife [see fig. 8], and Ffrwd Fawr, the great waterfall nearby. These passages are taken from an 'Itinerarium Cambriae' which Warlock sketched for Cecil Gray in 1922:

At Dylife there is a magnificent waterfall 130 feet high, from an overhanging crag on the edge of a terrific and gloomy gorge which should always be seen towards evening we will foregather at the [Star] inn, a very strange place and one of the best spots I know.³⁵

³² 'Bela Bartock [sic]: Famous composer at Aberystwyth: An epoch-making visit,' *Cambrian News*, 24 March 1922.

³³ I. Parrott, *The Crying Curlew* (Llandysul, 1994), 29.

³⁴ N. Heseltine, op. cit., 158.

³⁵ P. Heseltine to Gray, 12 June 1922.

and:

Rivers shall flow with red beer and torrents with brown beer, nor shall the tumultuous cataract at Dylife exceed in foaming volume the good ale that shall be quaffed.³⁶

Peter Warlock left Cefn Bryntalch in 1925 to share a cottage at Eynsford, Kent, with a new girlfriend, Barbara Peache, the composer Jack Moeran, their Maori factotum Hal Collins and a quantity of cats. Today's villagers still goggle as they remember the manservant descended from cannibals; Warlock and his women three to a bed; Constant Lambert and Lord Berners turning up in a Rolls-Royce; and the kitchen swimming in beer. Montgomeryshire references are scant in Warlock's Eynsford letters, although he did stay at Bryntalch when the lease on his cottage ran out in 1928, writing to an unnamed correspondent:

I feel slightly stupefied by this country-house life, which is really most pleasant when there are no tiresome visitors. One has at least a dozen empty rooms to oneself, and every one with a perfectly amazing view over long vistas of rolling hills and dense woods in all their autumnal brilliance. I seem to do nothing but eat enormously, read Dickens, and listen to German opera and symphony concerts on the wireless – being isolated on the top of a hill one hears these things exceptionally well. The prospect of being able to do any work becomes daily more and more remote; I feel like a vegetable.³⁷

The last two years of Warlock's life were spent in London and he made his final visit to the Hall in October 1930, following an outward route via Hay-on-Wye and Knighton before looking in on Ludlow as he travelled back to his basement flat in Chelsea. Covie invited her son to return for Christmas, but Warlock replied on 15 November 1930:

I would very much rather come and visit you at some time other than Christmas. It is the season of the year that I dislike more and more as time goes on, and the Christmas atmosphere and festivities induce for me an extremity of gloom and melancholy which make me very poor company at such a time. I find it very much better to remain more or less alone and devote myself to some quiet work.³⁸

³⁶ P. Heseltine to Gray, 14 June 1922.

³⁷ P. Heseltine to an unknown correspondent, [October 1928], in C. Gray, *Peter Warlock: A Memoir of Philip Heseltine* (London, 1934), 280.

³⁸ P. Heseltine to E. Buckley Jones, 15 November 1930.

In the event, Warlock was granted his Christmas wish for he spent the festive season of 1930 entirely alone: in his coffin at Godalming Old Cemetery, Surrey. The circumstances of Warlock's death created much difficulty, as well as distress. A draft pencil will in favour of a long-term, on-off girlfriend, Winifred Baker, was found in the gas-filled Chelsea flat, but an earlier will, made in 1920, stood, and its sole beneficiary was Warlock's Dutch Master, Bernard van Dieren. The consequences for Covie and Walter Buckley Jones, and for Nigel Heseltine who was effectively disinherited by his own father, were severe [see fig. 9]. Parts of the Cefn Bryntalch estate were sold off – indeed, this process had already begun three months before Warlock's death and he cannot have been unaware of it – and the oak woods were chopped down at a rate of £5 a tree to pay off van Dieren to the tune of £6,000.

Peter Warlock's friends arranged two memorial concerts of his music at London's Wigmore Hall in 1931. It is striking that several of Warlock's compositions were also programmed in the immediate aftermath of his death in Montgomeryshire, at Gregynog, in 1932. Since 2002, the triennial Gŵyl Peter Warlock Festivals, the first held in Llandyssil and the second in Montgomery, have sought to refocus attention on the composer and his links with the county. It is pleasing that the programmes have engaged large local audiences as well as visitors from all over the United Kingdom and even the United States. This must surely reflect the power of internet publicity but also, I believe, chimes in with the sense of *cynefin*, or spirit of place: an increasingly popular concept for residents and cultural tourists alike.

Sixty years and more before the concept of 'branding', Peter Warlock certainly understood the spirit of Montgomeryshire, as I trust these brief extracts from his creative work, both literary and musical, have demonstrated. The composer Elizabeth Poston's recollections of Cefn Bryntalch, and its importance for Warlock, will also resonate with all who love the pace and quality of Montgomeryshire life:

It was a place of books and ordered comfort: the country-house surroundings of flowers and dogs, Morris wallpapers and log fires . . . a welcoming and lovely place, with the River Severn to bathe and fish in . . . a landscape of family acres and sturdy eccentrics . . . They were a peaceful community, and it was one he came back to.³⁹

³⁹ Elizabeth Poston. 'Dispelling the jackals,' BBC broadcast script, 1964, in D. Cox and J. Bishop (eds.), *Peter Warlock: A Centenary Celebration*, (London, 1994), 12.



Fig. 1. Cefn Bryntalch in its setting.



Fig. 2. Cefn Bryntalch, façade.

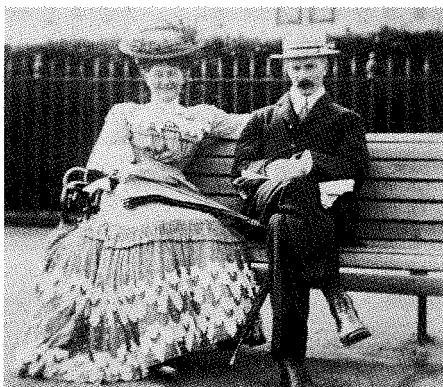


Fig. 3. Mr and Mrs Walter Buckley Jones, Philip Heseltine's mother and stepfather.



Fig. 4. Heseltine and his mother in the rose garden at Cefn Bryntalch.



Fig. 5. Philip Heseltine, 1923.

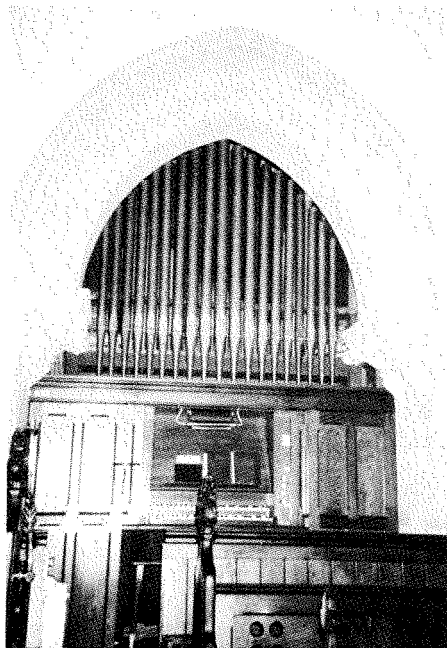


Fig. 6. The organ in Llandyssil Church.



Fig. 7. Montgomery Castle.

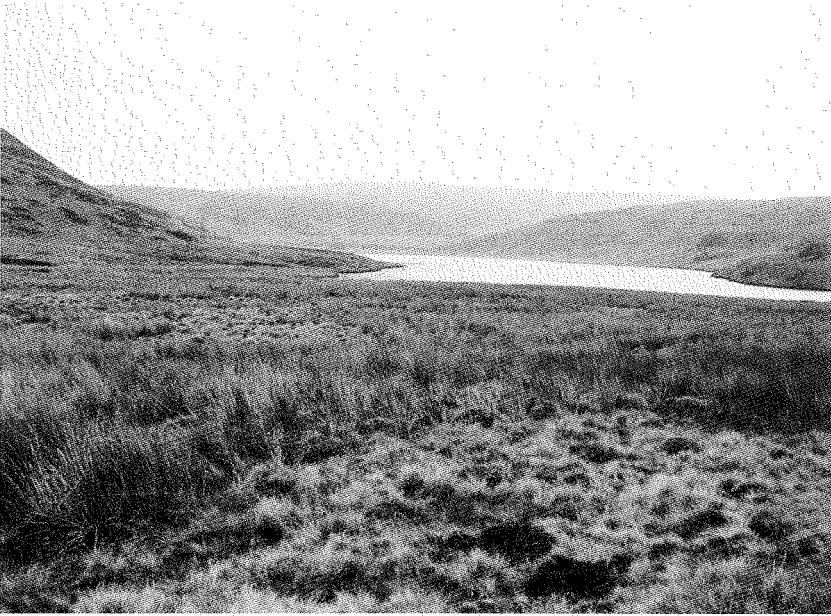


Fig. 8. Bugeilyn.



Fig. 9. Nigel Heseltine.