

Elgar in Craven

An exhibition at the Museum of North Craven Life, 2007

Panel 1: Elgar: the early years

Edward Elgar was born, the fourth of six children, on 2 June, 1857 at Broadheath near Worcester. His father was a piano tuner and a capable violinist and organist, who, in Elgar's early childhood, moved his family into Worcester and set up a music business in the High Street.

The young Edward was steeped in music from his earliest years, learning to play a range of instruments and taking part in local music-making. On leaving school, he went for a short time into a solicitor's office, but determined to pursue a professional career as a performer and composer.

Elgar played the violin in various orchestras and took part in Three Choirs Festival performances. He also deputised for his father as organist at St George's Roman Catholic Church in Worcester and took up the position of bandmaster at the County Asylum. In 1882 he became conductor of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society, an appointment which led to his first meeting with Dr Charles Buck of Settle.

Image captions:

- *Elgar as a boy (courtesy of the Elgar Birthplace Museum)*
- *Elgar's birthplace at Broadheath (courtesy of the Elgar Birthplace Museum)*
- *The family shop in Worcester (courtesy of the Elgar Birthplace Museum)*

For more information on the Elgar Birthplace Museum and the Elgar Foundation, please visit: <http://www.elgarmuseum.org/>

Panel 2: 'My dear doctor'

Charles William Buck was born in Kirkgate, Settle in 1851, the son of Richard Hardacre Buck, a solicitor. He was educated at Giggleswick School and Owen's College, Manchester, completing his medical training in London. He set up in practice in his home town in 1876, occupying a large three-storey house in the market place.

In addition to his professional career, Buck was a devoted and highly competent musician. He played the violin, viola and 'cello and conducted the local orchestra. He was also a keen



antiquarian and a friend of Thomas Brayshaw, contributing articles to Brayshaw's newly-formed Settle Chronicle.

Not surprisingly, it was Buck's musical interests which caused him to meet the young Edward Elgar. In August 1882, the British Medical Association met in Worcester. Buck attended the meeting and was invited to augment an orchestra conducted by Elgar to entertain the company at a soiree. He was introduced to Elgar by John Beare, a London instrument dealer, whose sister, Emma, became Buck's wife. There was an immediate rapport between the two men and Buck invited Elgar to stay at Cravendale, his Giggleswick home. Elgar accepted with alacrity and wrote a letter to Buck on 25 August.

Image captions:

- *Buck's house and surgery in Settle market place*
 - *Dr Buck with members of Settle orchestra*
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Panel 3: Music-making

Elgar's visit to Buck in 1882 was the first of many and the two men became regular correspondents. Elgar was an excellent letter-writer, often chastising Buck for his brief and illegible replies. Elgar's letters became progressively less formal, as he moved from addressing Buck as 'My dear doctor' to 'My dear Charles' and, on occasion, 'My dear Charlie'.

Buck preserved nearly all of Elgar's letters and they provide important insights into the struggles of his early career. In a letter of January, 1884 he wrote, '... it seems to me the only person who is an utter failure in this miserable world is myself ... I am disappointed, disheartened and sick of this world altogether'. Buck had a high regard for Elgar's talents and gave him the encouragement and support he often needed in these difficult years.

During Elgar's visits, there was much music-making with Buck, his wife Emma, whom he had married in 1884 and his circle of musical friends. Elgar frequently discussed his compositions with Buck and in 1885 dedicated a Gavotte for violin to 'son ami Dr C W Buck'. It is highly probable that the first draft of *Salut d'Amour* was composed at Settle and several other compositions are associated with his North Craven visits. He also harmonised a number of local folk songs which had been collected by Buck.

Image captions:

- *Elgar in 1882*
 - *Emma Buck outside Cravendale*
 - *Gavotte dedicated by Elgar to his friend Dr Buck*
 - *Elgar's harmonisation of the folk song Clapham Town End*
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Panel 4: 'The mad days'

Music was not all that Elgar and Buck had in common; they shared the same sense of humour and a liking for 'japes'. Various escapades recounted in the letters bear witness to this. They also enjoyed discussions of a more serious nature during their walks and drives together and it is clear from his letters that Elgar often confided his personal troubles to Buck.

Elgar quickly became attached to the magnificent scenery of Craven and derived much pleasure from the photographs that Buck sent him. He also made the acquaintance of several other local people, including Thomas Brayshaw and Jack Baguley, whose untimely death occasioned the composition of 'Thro' the Long Days'.

An introduction of some significance was to the Wilkinson family of Hellifield Green. It would appear that Elgar developed an affection for the eldest daughter, Sarah Ann which was firmly suppressed by her father, a well-to-do landowner, who did not wish his daughter to marry a penniless musician.

In 1885, Buck presented Elgar with one of his terriers, 'Scap', of whom Elgar was very fond, and thereafter the letters carry numerous references to the dog and his exploits.

Image captions:

- *Catterick Force*
- *Elgar at a tea party at Hellifield Green; he is standing in the centre of the group with Sarah Ann seated in front of him.*
- *Family group on the steps of Hellifield Grange: Sarah Ann is standing in front of her father.*

Panel 5: Marriage and fame

Elgar married Caroline Alice Roberts in 1889 and was delighted when Buck attended the ceremony at Brompton Oratory. The marriage brought him great happiness and his wife's unflinching encouragement and practical help allowed him at last to find his true voice as a composer. During the 1890s he began to write larger works which gained him the recognition that had for so long eluded him. The composition which finally captured the public imagination was his Variations on an original theme for Orchestra, 'Enigma'.

Inevitably, as Elgar's fame increased, there were fewer opportunities for meetings with Buck and his family, but the two men kept in touch and on the occasions when Elgar was conducting at the Leeds Festival he would invite him to performances. He also sent postcards and letters to Buck's young daughter Monica.

Buck's wife Emma died in 1902 and he re-married in 1904. His second wife, Ella Watkins was daughter of the Archdeacon of York and the couple made their home in York until Ella's untimely death in 1907.

Image captions:

- *Elgar in 1899*
 - *Elgar's letter to Monica Buck, recalling how he and her father hunted cats on Giggleswick Scar.*
 - *Buck and his daughter, Monica outside Cravendale*
 - *Elgar invites Buck to a concert in Leeds and admonishes him not to smoke.*
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Panel 6: The last years

After the death of his wife in 1920, Elgar composed little of great importance, but his musical career was far from over. In 1924 he was appointed Master of the King's Musick and many public honours were conferred on him. He had been deeply interested for a long time in the 'new technology' of the gramophone and conducted a number of recordings of his own works for HMV.

Buck returned to spend the long years of his retirement in the old family home in Giggleswick. He continued to enjoy his music-making and antiquarian interests, writing articles and lecturing to local groups. In 1931, he was elected President of the Settle Naturalist and Antiquarian Society, founded in 1927 by Thomas Brayshaw.

During these last years, Elgar and Buck continued to correspond. The letters often contain references to the ailments of increasing age, but also look back nostalgically to the 'mad days' of the 1880s. In one of his few surviving letters to Elgar, written shortly before his eighty-first birthday, Buck recalls the old times with great clarity and affection. Elgar's final letter to Buck sets the seal on their fifty year friendship in these words, 'In this August weather I always live over again the holidays I had with you and the taste of potted Ribble trout comes with ineffaceable relish: nothing so good in eating or company has occurred to me since 1882'.

Image captions:

- *three images: one of Elgar, one of Dr Buck, and one of a letter from Elgar to Dr Buck: no captions*