

Sir Edward Elgar

Ask who is Worcester's most famous person and it is quite likely that the answer will be Elgar. He was born within the city boundary, lived more than half his life within or within sight of the city, and always claimed that the inspiration for his music came from the countryside around and the Malvern Hills.

He was born in 1857 at Lower Broadheath, died in the Rainbow Hill area and is buried in St Wulstan's Churchyard in Malvern with his wife Alice. His music is known worldwide. The Pomp and Circumstance March No 1, better known as 'Land of Hope and Glory' is sung annually at the Last Night of the Proms in London and is perhaps his best known work. Others would choose his 'Enigma Variations' or The 'Dream of Gerontius' as the pieces most to remember him by.

He is commemorated in Worcester by a statue at the end of the High Street. This was commissioned and unveiled in on June 2nd 1981, the anniversary of his birth. It is close to the music shop which owned by his father and facing Worcester Cathedral, where many of his works were performed and where new compositions often had their debut performance.

Much of his early music was played at St George's Church in Worcester where he was the organist and it is reputed that during the sermons he composed music for the Worcester Glee Club. Founded in 1809 or 1810, the Glee Club was a group of singers and musicians that met at the Crown Hotel in the centre of the city, and gave regular performances in the Cathedral. Elgar became the President late in the nineteenth century. He could play many musical instruments and one of the archives includes a short newspaper article inquiring about the whereabouts of a trombone. The story goes that at the end of WWI there was an appeal for instruments for the Musicians Fund of the YMCA, and Elgar donated a trombone. It was subsequently engraved to show its provenance.

He was a great favourite of royalty and in addition to his knighthood was created Knight Commander of the Victorian Order. He was Master of the Kings Music, and on his appointment in 1924 was hailed as 'the greatest British composer of his generation'. Alice, his wife and greatest source of inspiration died in 1920 and his health steadily declined until his death in 1934. Such was his acclaim in Worcester that the Lord Mayor led a civic procession from the Guildhall to the Cathedral to his memorial service.

The Cathedral has a huge memorial in the form of a stained glass window depicting the theme of 'The Dream of Gerontius'. This was created shortly after his death and records in the archives show that £500 was made available for it. Subscriptions came from all over Britain and the archives show several letters to the Lord Mayor in response to the appeal. There are also copies of the order of service for the memorial service held shortly after his death and telegrams from the Lord Mayor to Buckingham Palace and the response from King George V regarding his death.