

## TALES FROM THE HILLS

(Ashmansworth and Crux Easton)



To boost our morale during the war, a small concert was held in Ashmansworth Church. In those days, turning the church into a concert hall provoked some uproar even though, in deference to the venue, the organiser, Gerald Finzi, called it 'An Hour of Music', and clapping was not allowed.

In a letter afterwards he wrote:

"... Mrs S of our village was horrified that Mrs W, a confessed unbeliever, should come into the church to hear the music, and went so far as to say she should not have been allowed in. Mrs W, on the other hand, was appalled at the vicar's prayers, which she thought quite out of place. Mr A, the churchwarden, thought the collection of £11.1s.6d very remarkable ...

"I should have been just as happy doing that music in a village hall as in the church, but I must admit that the setting was marvellous and that that itself was part of the art. I didn't rejoice that only four people go to church on Sunday and 100 came to hear music on a weekday ..., but I did rejoice to think that, perhaps for the first time in history, most of the Chapel (the Methodists) attended the Church, and that agnostics, RCs, Anglo-Catholics, Jews, Chapel and C of E were all gathered together, seeing a beautiful sight, listening to decent music, and with all their ridiculous differences dropped for at least an hour."

Talking of decent music, what is Beethoven's connection with Ashmansworth?

Well, in 1949 the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote to ask Finzi to be one of his literary executors, adding: "I am leaving you Beethoven's tuning fork, which was left to me by Gustav Holst to be passed on to anyone I considered worthy."

Sadly, in the event, Ashmansworth never saw the tuning fork. Finzi died, aged 56, before he could inherit it. But the story does show the esteem in which he was held by his fellow composer, Vaughan Williams. His biographer suggests this esteem was generated by Finzi's "extraordinary overall creative will."

Once Finzi had died, no-one else merited the tuning fork. It is now in the British Library.

*Agricola*