

BRINGING OUR ARCHIVES TO LIFE

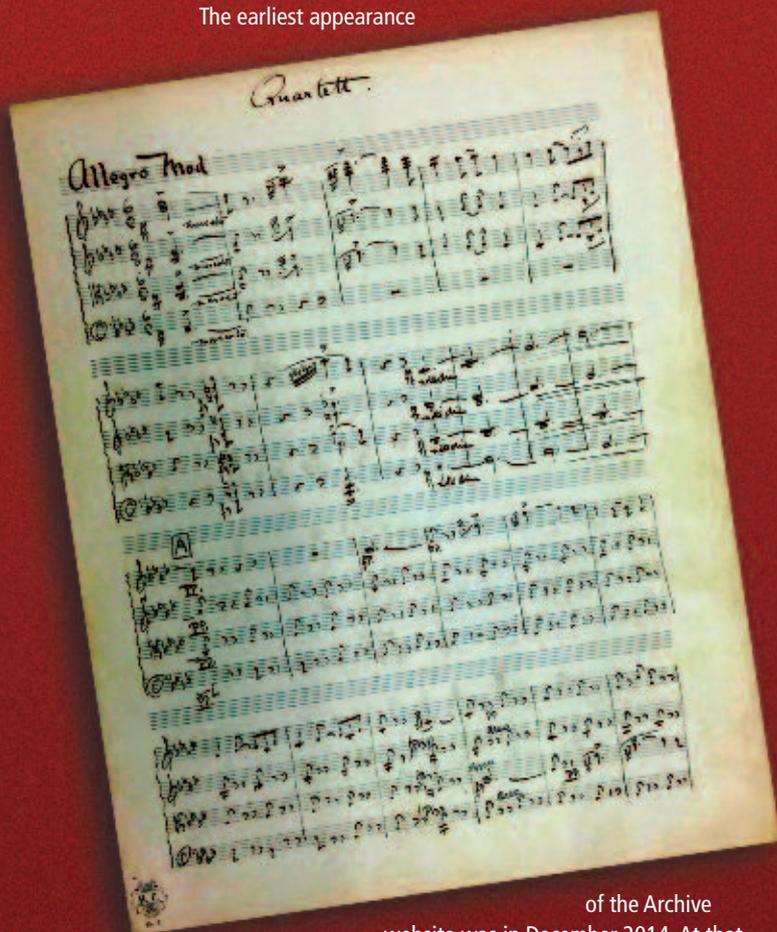
Five years of exploration

Five years ago, the Court generously agreed to support the first stage of our work on the Company's Archives; it was a major task but now inventories are available for almost 250 years' worth of Company history – and what a history it has been!

The discovery of so much of musical and historical interest has been thrilling: composers' manuscript scores, previously believed lost; information about former Company members, whose generosity has put our charitable activities on such a sound footing today; innovative Company projects, notably during the late 19th century and The Great War, with its gifts of gold watches to musician winners of the VC – to mention just a few.

Liveryman David Herbert's indefatigable work in creating our archival website (www.wcomarchive.org.uk) has made all this history available to everyone: Company members and their families, City historians, musicologists and genealogists are just some of the groups who have already used and benefited from his endeavours.

The earliest appearance



The first page of Frank Bridge's *Phantasie String Quartet* (1905), a manuscript thought lost until rediscovered by the archivists in 2016

of the Archive website was in December 2014. At that inaugural stage, just 56 pages from the first book of Court Minutes were presented as online digital photographs, taken by David with his iPhone! By April 2015 nearly 3,000 pages had been photographed, taking our digitisations up to the year 1918.

However, since then, Court Minutes have accounted for only a small percentage of the archive website. The greater part is concerned with explaining and displaying our treasured

manuscript scores, detailing the many Composition Competitions held since the Coronation Prize March of 1902, together with photographs, letters and programmes and the stories which emanate therefrom. It is amazing how many of these articles, activities and personnel crossover and interconnect.

Thankfully, it is relatively straightforward for such links and associations to be signposted on the website – far easier than referring to books, registers and pamphlets!

One of the most important aspects of digitising and publishing our Archive has been the minimisation of future handling of these unique documents. An inventory of everything we originally deposited at Guildhall Library was assembled some time ago; as a result of subsequent in-depth investigations and web-photography since 2014, that inventory has been fully updated and now also indicates which items appear on the website.

An important part of our original intention in establishing this Archive Project was to pull together, into a 'searchable' format, a list of every member of the Company going as far back as possible in the Company's history (to 1469 perhaps?). We have moved closer to that goal by the recent presentation on the website of many volumes and pamphlets containing a large number of Livery Lists and apprentice bindings, together with some Parish Registers going back to the sixteenth century.

Also, for some time now, Liveryman Margot Mouat has been 'transcribing' the Court Minutes from 1772 (the earliest extant) from their hand-written originals into searchable computerised text.

Margot writes:

With the very welcome support of Liveryman Mandy Peat, we have so far completed Books 1-5 and part of Book 6 of the Minutes, covering 1772 to 1867 – in years about half of the total.

I volunteered to manage the transcription of the Minutes so that information currently hidden in old books would be accessible to the wider world without damage to the originals. The Minutes vary enormously in detail and quality – and styles differ too; for example, a Mr France was Clerk from 1856-66 and wrote very brief Minutes – upon his sudden death the Company found that Mr France had been equally brief with payment of Company debts, leaving a number unpaid, despite his having been paid for them...

My starting point was a complete word-for-word transcription, but after discussion with my co-archivists Paul and David, we agreed that key data only would be included – names, addresses, crafts and professions for Liverymen and Freemen, letters received from City and Government bodies, appointments, and any unusual items. This has made the task quicker and easier – a whole page of nineteenth century copperplate may result in just four lines in the transcription without omitting anything important. The results are stored in a single PDF document on the website and anyone can search for a name, a place, or a craft – or even another Livery company. We still have 1867 to 1937 to transcribe – if you would like to help out do please contact me!

Pastmaster PAUL CAMPION with Liverymen DAVID HERBERT & MARGOT MOUAT



The first design of our Company's Livery Medal from 1906