

# Stabilising interpretation and expression: the conservation of the Vaughan Williams annotated score of the St Matthew Passion

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In 1931, the St Matthew Passion was first performed at the Leith Hill Musical Festival, with Ralph Vaughan Williams conducting his interpretation of Bach's original score. This annual choral music event, established by the Vaughan Williams family in 1905, has continued to be based around this key work, and as such the annotated score has gained totemic status in the Festival's archive collections.

1931

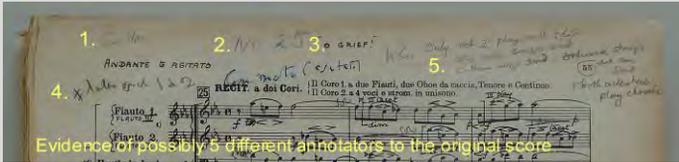
## 1. Ralph Vaughan Williams, Festival Conductor 1905 - 1953



The score itself is a standard early twentieth century printed edition of the St Matthew Passion, mass produced by leading German music publishers Breitkopf and Härtel: practical, largely ephemeral and constructed using very low quality materials and binding techniques. It is elevated beyond its ordinary status by Vaughan Williams's lively, some have said eccentric, interpretation and expression throughout the work.



The score has continued to be manipulated by subsequent Festival conductors, most notably by Vaughan Williams's successor William Cole, with additional interpretation through yet more inserted material and marginalia. As such it is effectively a complete record of the history of the performance of the St Matthew Passion at the Leith Hill Musical Festival.

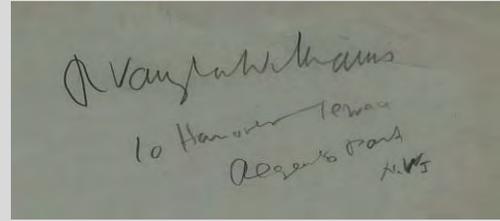


Evidence for possibly 5 different annotators to the original score

## 3. Request to borrow the score by the State Symphony Capella of Russia, February 2016

In 2016 the score was requested for loan with the intention that Vaughan Williams's interpretation of the St Matthew Passion be performed in Russia. With the material instability and the damaged condition of the score making it too fragile for use as a working document or for loan, the decision was made by the Festival committee to conserve for digitisation to allow the work to be performed.

The extensive and unstable edge tears were repaired, locatable losses were reinstated and all loose inserts were hinged to allow access to the score below. Rehousing provided an effective preservation tool, with each of the three sections of the textblock as well as the original binding stored in paper folders in individual kase-make boxes.



Using strips of paper adhered across the text to partially block out unwanted sections, along with extensive and expansive manuscript marginalia in ink, graphite and blue pencil, Vaughan Williams created a musical composition that was far from the original piece and unique to his own physical and material design.



## 2. William Cole, Festival Conductor 1954 - 1977



The stratified text block construction was created using multiple layers of pressure sensitive tape and liberal applications of an animal-based adhesive, both of which were beginning to degrade. This and the extensively broken sewing, prolific tears to every leaf and edge chipping of the fragile pages made the loss of the added inserts and therefore the interpretation likely without intervention.



## 4. Conservation, digitisation and rehousing, July 2016



As the intention was to use the digital copy to create a physical bound facsimile of the score, and as this would bear use as a research copy, conservation was minimal for stabilisation and preservation rather than reconstruction. Unfortunately, the fragility of the brittle and degraded short-fibred paper structure meant the spine folds would not have been sufficiently strong to allow resewing.

2016