In the Autumn of 1988 the British Library published *Working with Vaughan Williams*, my account of eleven years spent as musical assistant to the composer, and of the friendship which grew up between us during that time. The volume prints in full seventy-four letters written to me by Vaughan Williams, interwoven with an explanatory commentary and personal narrative; it is illustrated with examples of some of the manuscripts and documents from which I had to work.\(^1\)

Since publication, further relevant material has come to light, and I have been able to add this to the British Library's now extensive collection of manuscripts of Vaughan Williams. As well as the additional letter\(^2\) (printed in full below), there are thirty-two pages of queries\(^3\) relating to the Eighth Symphony (composed in 1953–6). Part of my job was to provide legible copies of Vaughan Williams's scores, in the process tidying up the kind of errors often found in manuscripts written out in the heat of composition, not to mention puzzling out his sometimes illegible handwriting. (The many complications involved in this simple sounding task are described in the book.) When direct consultation was not possible, I would send through the post lists of queries, written out on music paper, concerning doubtful-looking details in his scores, such as discrepancies of sharps or flats, adjustments of dynamics, and sometimes corrections of actual notes which looked wrong to me. Vaughan Williams would scribble his replies on these sheets and return them to me.

It was possible to illustrate *Working with Vaughan Williams* with a page from the composer's autograph full score of the Eighth Symphony showing how some of the problems raised in the letters had been solved (plates 6, 7), but I had thought that all the query sheets for this symphony had been lost long ago,\(^4\) so this is a particularly welcome discovery. Some of the composer's replies (often themselves barely legible) are typical of his wry sense of humour at his own expense. For example, three small queries about apparently wrong notes were briefly answered thus:

What the devil the E is doing there I cannot imagine!
I cannot remember what I meant but I think I prefer F sharp.
I am a bloody fool. Trb pt shd be...

Inadvertently he had written a note for the piccolo which was below its compass; he confessed to making this tiny error, declaring with humorous self-reproach:

As before I am a bloody fool — I knew that perfectly — pure carelessness (Dr Johnson)

In response to my doubts concerning some Italian words, he assured me:

Yes I believe that is correct Italian — after consulting several dictionaries — do you know any live Italians

At a climax in the last movement he had written a glissando — a vigorous sweeping of the hammer to and fro — across the tubular bells. I pointed out that this might result in a full D major scale being used, rather than the five-note scale which he wanted, and I proposed an alternative. Also I warned him that the glissando might 'drown everything else'. The replies to my suggestions were written in a particularly spidery example of his 'caco-grapby' (his own word for his handwriting). When at last deciphered, his comments were found to be optimistic, though not entirely confident:

I understood that the bell merchant only hangs up the bells he wants which will (wd?) make the gliss...
Fig. 1. A page of Roy Douglas's queries on the last movement of Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony, with the composer's replies. Add. MS. 65533, f. 28
feasible – otherwise we must adopt your suggestion – I will risk total immersion – I’ve never heard the bells enough yet in any music

A couple of perplexities in the last movement needed decisive elucidations from the composer. Each of these concerned a passage in the full score which was one bar shorter than the corresponding passage in his short score (a kind of piano sketch). In each instance I asked him if he wanted to insert the missing bar in the full score. For the first of these problems his solution was firm and concise:

No, we will leave it out! what I originally meant I can’t remember.

In answer to my query on the second of these passages, his laconic (and surely tongue-in-cheek) verdict was:

Keep as in score – the less of this movement we have the better!

The letter, dating from 1953, provides further evidence of Vaughan Williams’s thoughtfulness and generosity to others in his comments on my work in drawing up an orchestral suite from his 1949 cantata Folk Songs of the Four Seasons.6 It also documents the final stages in the minor but fascinating story of his eventual acceptance of the correct form of the name for his Seventh Symphony. The letter is in Vaughan Williams’s hand throughout, and is written on paper printed with his address of The White Gates, Dorking.

Jan 5 1953

Dear Roy

Here are your notes with my comments

As regards the title I feel that you have put such a lot of work into it that the chief credit ought to be yours – so I am proposing to the OUP the title

Roy Douglas

Folk songs of the four seasons
Suite for orchestra

founded on the Cantata of the same name by

R. Vaughan Williams

By the way the pundits have discovered that ‘Antarctica’ is correct Italian – so I have had to climb down!

Yrs
RVW

From a comparison between this letter and the rest of our correspondence it becomes clear that although Vaughan Williams was aware of the Italian form Sinfonia Antartica, he was persuaded to abandon his preferred Antarctica only at the very last moment:6 the first performance of the symphony was given by the Hallé Orchestra, under Sir John Barbirolli, at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester on 14 January 1953.

I am grateful for the help of Arthur Searle, Curator of Music Manuscripts at the British Library, in the preparation of this article.

2 Now BL, Add. MS. 63547 A, f. 63*.
3 Now part of Add. MS. 65533, which also contains similar material relating to Act iii of the opera Pilgrim’s Progress and to Vaughan Williams’s arrangement for chorus and orchestra of The Old Hundredth Psalm Tune.
4 Similar query sheets for the Ninth Symphony are in Add. MS. 50382; see Working with Vaughan Williams, pl. 10.
5 Folk Songs of the Four Seasons, Suite, arranged for small orchestra from the cantata of the same name, by Roy Douglas (London, 1956); see Working with Vaughan Williams, p. 41.
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