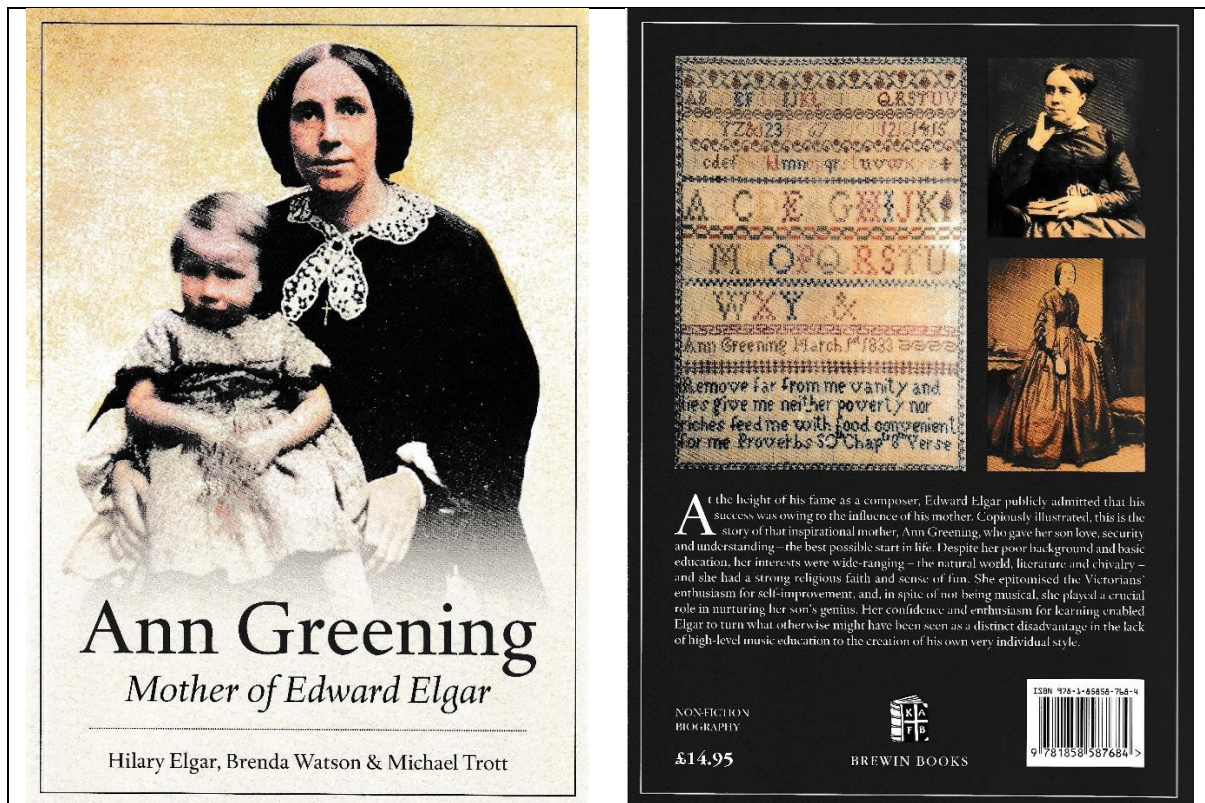
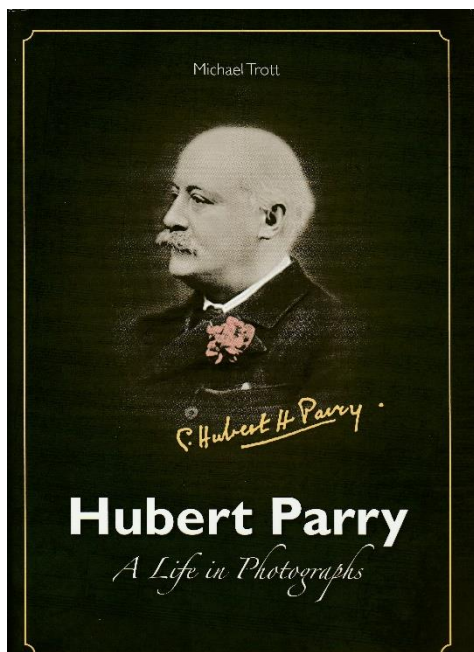


A Short Review of Michael's Excellent History Book



I would like to commend heartily Michael's book which was the source of his recent talk to the Society which can still be viewed on <https://www.tewkesburyhistory.org/home> - April 2024 meeting.

I was already so very impressed by his superbly illustrated and researched book on another of our local composers, **Hubert Parry**. If you have not yet read this book, I can only heartily commend it. That book, and this new book, can surely be obtained by emailing mwtrott@hotmail.com.



local composers, **Hubert Parry**. If you have not yet read this book, I can only heartily commend it. That book, and this new book, can surely be obtained by emailing mwtrott@hotmail.com.

In many ways, this was a bigger challenge for the author as he chose to work with Elgar's family to research and write a book, not about a famous and well-resourced composer in Edward Elgar, but on his hitherto unknown mother, **Anne Greening**. Her history was much less heralded as she was born into a poor family of agricultural workers in Worcestershire. Because of her own qualities, however, as a mother to the composer, she played a very significant part in setting Edward Elgar on the path to being an internationally successful composer. Michael stresses that she had no musical education herself but, through self-education, she brought up her family of five children to be very well attuned to cultural life, although two sons died in childhood. She

expressed herself in poetry and encouraged her family to be interested in, for example, the poetry of Longfellow and the 'ancient history' of Caractacus who rebelled against the Roman Empire.

Ostensibly, it should have been Elgar's father who was the dominant long-term influence as he came a quite prosperous seller of pianos and music. However, it is clear that he had little interest in the qualities of Edward and did little to encourage him. It was Elgar's mother who decided to immerse herself in the *Roman Catholic Church* and the composer followed her lead and, indeed, he gained early employment as a church organist. He then made a socially acceptable marriage to the daughter of an Indian Army Major-General and she, herself, converted to her husband's – and cherished mother-in-law's - religion.

Michael added value into the family's research as he researched the context of his humble woman's life - all through the book, he sought to understand the historical forces which influenced them with sections on *Sources, Background Information* which included fact **Boxes** on important factors.

As his mother died in 1902, aged 80, it is not surprising that we do not learn much about the composer's music – it only included the very religious *Dream of Gerontius*, which I discovered as an impressionable teenager, and the *Enigma Variations*. He was knighted in 1904, only two years after her death.

I would encourage Michael now to turn his attention to the life of the composer and analyse how his mother's influence impacted on his later compositions which have made him famous. Did a 'dominant' mother have only a positive impact on his life? I noted that Parry considered his friend "*intractable*" – how significant was this possibly negative characteristic?

So I congratulate the retired Dowty aeronautical engineer's skill at researching and writing history books and would encourage him to turn his attention to Elgar, with the flair and skill which he produced the life of the aristocratic **Hubert Parry**.

John Dixon, 31 May 2024