

Programme Notes

The main musical material of the work is derived from a graph on the current façade of St Helen's Town Hall. By overlaying a musical staff onto an image of the building, the contours, peaks and troughs provide a series of notes, or a tone row, as shown in the diagram below.



I: THE BRIGANTES

The Brigantes were a Celtic tribe who settled in an area covering much of the north of England across the counties that would ultimately form Lancashire and Yorkshire. Where St Helens currently sits is within this area, and the tribe were settled in this region until the 1st century AD Roman Conquest, when nearby Wigan was selected as a place for a new Roman settlement and the Brigantes became subjugated. Throughout this movement, there is a strong feel of the traditional 'Celtic' musical elements, with an almost dance-like feel to much of the rhythmic work, and light-footed solo playing.

II: ST ELYNS CHAPEL

The name of St Helens dates back to 1552, with the first documentation of a chapel of ease dedicated to St Elyn in Hardshaw (near the site of the current pedestrianised Church Street). The Chapel was said to be the crux of the four townships of Eccleston, Parr, Sutton and Windle. These civil parishes were what eventually became the borough of St Helens. As a reflective and tranquil core to the work I decided to pay homage to two composers from both the orchestral and brass band worlds who's music I find emotionally engaging; Arthur Bliss and Eric Ball.

III: FROM THE GROUND, LIGHT

Until the mid 18th-century, the town's local industry was mainly based on small-scale home-based initiatives such as weaving and light extraction. Sitting on the South Lancashire coalfield, the town was physically and metaphorically built on coal, and it was this reason the council's coat of arms bore the motto 'Ex Terra Lucem'. The phrase refers to both the abundant and winnable coal resources (which can be burnt to produce 'light') in addition to their use in local industries such as glass (through which light passes). The motto of the town and larger borough was changed in 1974 to 'Prosperitas in Excelsis' (success in the highest, or, flourishing well), which is included on the arms of the Metropolitan Borough Council, but following its inspiration of the Olympic Gamers' Opening Ceremony in 2012, residents felt the original motto was more appropriate to the town's history and had a greater meaning for the local people representing hope for the future, and the motto was changed back to its original. Like the coal industry, the music is a 'slow-burner', gradually building from a quiet, high minimalist-esque figure in the cornets at the outset through to the thunderous clunks and clangs of machinery towards the end of the movement. The majority of the movement has a sense of minor tonality, before the light emerges from the depths at the close.