

### *Another Sussex Harmony Anniversary*

2018 marked the 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of Rachel Jordan's tenure as Music Director of Sussex Harmony. With her flaming waist length hair and oboe always at the ready, Rachel is much, much more than a conductor.

Like several of the West Gallery quire leaders, she is an active researcher of the county's musical past. She concentrates on the rich legacy of music that we are fortunate to have in the MacDermott Collection held in Lewes. In 1917, whilst Rector of Selsey near Chichester, the Rev. Kenneth MacDermott wrote to over 200 parish churches in the diocese asking for information about the church bands and their music before they were forgotten. The fruits of his labours form the basis of a collection of manuscripts and printed books now held by the Sussex Archaeological Society. Rachel is a frequent visitor to their little room in Barbican House near Lewes Castle. With the help of friendly archive staff who have been cultivated over the years, she will take photos of manuscripts and hand-written part books to arrange and transcribe them for the singers and instrumentalists of Sussex Harmony, appropriately using the copyright name gingasinga!

Luckily there is so much available to us in one form or another that we can invariably take back to the churches, chapels and villages where we are asked to perform the very music last performed there in the 18th and 19th centuries. Enlivened by readings with a local flavour and Rachel's hours of research on family websites, she has been responsible for putting together many memorable concerts and workshops from one end of the county to the other. Informative, illustrated programmes are always produced for our concerts by Rachel and duplicated, sometimes in the dark of the night, in the chambers of her barrister partner, Nick Hall.

Rachel obtained a degree in music at the University of Exeter, specialising in the oboe. She sang with the Exeter University Singers, directed by Donald James, and was a member of the Exeter Early Music Group in which she sang, and played recorder and crumhorn. Having moved to Lewes in 1978, she began instrumental teaching of oboe, clarinet, flute and recorder – her students ranging in age from 5 to 80+. In the early 1980s she played oboe and cor anglais in the Sussex University Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra as well as in other smaller ensembles. Sussex Harmony instrumentalists are often given assistance and the benefit of her knowledge whether they play a curtal, double bass, flute, recorder or clarinet. Perhaps that's why we have such a good mix of instruments backing us up.

Another genre of music taking up her time is Sacred Harp or Shape Note Music; this is the cappella sacred choral music originating in New England and the southern states of America but with roots dating back to West Gallery music. In demand as a leader and pitcher –that's the person who sets the pitch of the piece to be performed – Rachel travels world-wide to participate in conventions of singers. Sussex Harmony will often include one of these pieces of vibrant music in its concerts, not to give the instrumentalists a well-earned break but to get them up on their feet singing too. Oh, I nearly forget, until recently, Rachel played a mean game of hockey at county level as a pastime.

In thanks for all her work over the years, we made a presentation to our amazing leader at one of our practices. We gave Rachel a super-duper Kenwood food mixer to replace the one given by her auntie on her 21st birthday! Knowing her, I'll guarantee that we'll get some home made cakes at our next practice.