

A SUSSEX GUIDE

SUSSEX MUSIC



MARCUS WEEKS

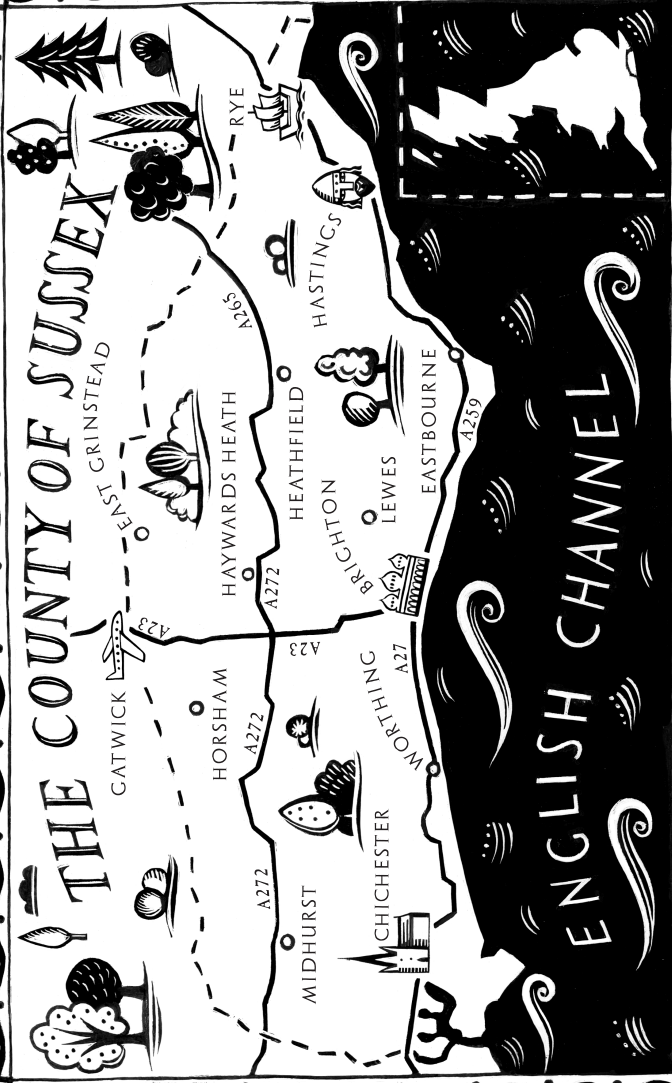
INTRODUCED BY

GAVIN HENDERSON



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THE COUNTY OF SUSSEX



GATWICK

HORSHAM

MIDHURST

CHICHESTER

WORTHING

EAST GRINSTEAD

HAYWARDS HEATH

HEATHFIELD

BRIGHTON

LEWES

EASTBOURNE

RYE

HASTINGS

ENGLISH CHANNEL

SUSSEX MUSIC

MARCUS WEEKS

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Illustrated by
MADDY McCLELLAN



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Book No 11

Books about Sussex for the enthusiast

Published in 2008 by
SNAKE RIVER PRESS
South Downs Way, Alfriston, Sussex BN26 5XW
www.snakeriverpress.co.uk

ISBN 978-1-906022-10-5

This book was conceived, designed and produced by
SNAKE RIVER PRESS

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Text © Marcus Weeks
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ART DIRECTOR & PUBLISHER *Peter Bridgewater*
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR *Viv Croot*
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PAGE MAKEUP *Richard Constable & Chris Morris*
ILLUSTRATOR *Maddy McClellan*
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This book is typeset in Perpetua & Gill Sans,
two fonts designed by Eric Gill

Printed and bound in China

DEDICATION

To Dad, who loved Sussex and music

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INTRODUCTION

‘... a lovely place to cultivate one’s egotism ... I shall have to leave, because there are too many draughts and too much music.’

CLAUDE DEBUSSY, LETTER FROM EASTBOURNE

It’s probably not the first county to spring to mind when thinking about music, but as Flora Poste, heroine of Stella Gibbons’s *Cold Comfort Farm*, pointed out, ‘Sussex, when all was said and done, was not quite like other counties’. Sussex people are reputedly obstinate and not easily impressed, but they can also be disarmingly modest – Sussex musicians are not ones to blow their own trumpet, and can give a false impression of the wealth of music in our county (yes, our county – I am one of those Sussex musicians).

This book is an attempt to redress the balance, for once proudly proclaiming our musical heritage and pointing out the often surprising contribution Sussex has made to music in Britain and indeed worldwide. Not only home-grown talent, but also as a place that has attracted musicians from elsewhere with its inspiring landscape and straightforward but easy-going people.

While making no claims to be a comprehensive survey (and certainly not a directory of venues and musicians or a guide to what’s on), I hope it gives an adequate flavour of the richness of musical life in Sussex past and present. The book is divided into sections covering folk music, classical music, the mixed bag of popular music from music hall to rock, and places of particular importance or interest in our musical history, such as Glyndebourne; something for all tastes then, even allowing for changes in fashion, and an unavoidably subjective emphasis in certain areas.

The first criterion for including people here is that they should have been born, or have spent some significant time, in Sussex, and contributed in some way to the music of the county. The amount of space devoted to each one, however, is not solely dictated by their musical merit, but often simply because there’s an interesting story to tell, especially if this is characteristically Sussex; that is, endearingly

eccentric, self-effacing, or downright bloody-minded. The places, similarly, have been chosen for their interest or historical significance rather than because they are major centres of musical activity, which come and go with changes in musical taste. There is (and, it appears, always has been) a lot of music in Sussex, and what appears in the limelight often hides what's going on backstage; inevitably, some names and places will have been missed – so my apologies to anyone disappointed or slighted by any omissions, which are, I hope, due to ignorance rather than prejudice.

In the research for this book, I often tumbled on something by sheer chance. For example, a jazz-playing colleague of mine mentioned in passing that the composer and writer Cyril Scott had been a neighbour of his in Eastbourne, affectionately known as 'Uncle Cyril' and locally famous for his lime-green piano; when I expressed some surprise, he replied, 'I thought everybody knew that'. This is a typically Sussex matter-of-fact attitude to celebrity, which is possibly why musicians like it here – but frustrating for those who aren't in the know. So, sadly, a lot of local 'common knowledge' actually remains a well-kept secret, and although I may have uncovered some of the lesser known stories of music in Sussex, there are probably still more lurking in corners around the county. I'd be genuinely delighted to hear from any readers.



SUSSEX BY THE SEA

BRITAIN'S ONLY COUNTY ANTHEM

Sussex has not only inspired a great deal of music, but is also arguably unique in having its own county anthem, *Sussex by the Sea*. This stirring march song is proudly performed by 'the men from Sussex' at any opportunity – it has been adopted by the county regiment as their regimental march, and as the school march of Christ's Hospital, it is the battle cry of Brighton & Hove Albion football club and Sussex cricket team, and it is sung at many of the Sussex bonfire celebrations.

Its enduring popularity both within and beyond the bounds of the county is no doubt due to its rousing opening fanfare and tuneful chorus as much as its (admittedly rather dated) patriotic lyrics, all of which were written by William Ward-Higgs – who was, however, not actually a Sussex man. He was born in Birkenhead in 1866, and spent much of his life in London working as a solicitor, living at Hollywood House in Bersted, Bognor Regis, for only five or six years. When his favourite sister-in-law became engaged to Captain Waithman of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment, Ward-Higgs decided to compose a song for the couple. He had previously set to music several of the *Barrack-Room Ballads* by Rudyard Kipling, and was probably inspired by Kipling's poem 'Sussex', which concludes with the line, 'Yea, Sussex by the sea!' The resulting paean to the county was published in 1907, and Waithman performed it in concerts at Ballykinlar Camp in Ireland where the battalion was then stationed. The men loved it, and it had become their regimental march by the time they were called upon to 'stand or fall' in World War I.

By this time, Ward-Higgs had moved to London. Suffering from epilepsy in later life, he was driven to take his own life in Roehampton in 1936, but his remains are buried, as befits the composer of the definitive Sussex anthem, in Bersted churchyard.

LYRICS TO SUSSEX BY THE SEA

VERSE 1

Now is the time for marching, now let
your hearts be gay,
Hark to the merry bugles sounding
along our way.
So let your voices ring my boys, and
take the time from me,
And I'll sing you a song as we march
along
Of Sussex by the sea!

CHORUS

Sussex, Sussex by the sea!
Good old Sussex by the sea!
You may tell them all we stand or fall
For Sussex by the sea.

VERSE 2

For we're the men from Sussex, Sussex
by the sea.
We plough and sow and reap and mow
And useful men are we
So when you go to Sussex, whoever you
may be,
You can tell them all that we stand
or fall
For Sussex by the sea!

VERSE 3

Up in the morning early, start at the
break of day,
March till the evening shadows, tell us
it's time to stay.
We're always moving on me boys, so
take your time from me,
And sing this song as we march along,
Of Sussex by the sea!

VERSE 4

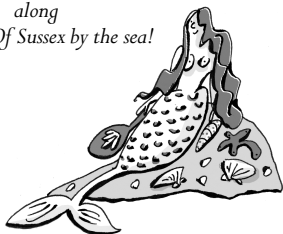
Light is the love of a soldier; that's
what the ladies say
Lightly he goes a wooing, lightly he
rides away,
In love and war, we always are as fair
as fair can be
And a soldier boy is a lady's joy
In Sussex by the sea!

VERSE 5

Far o'er the seas we soldier, wide
through the world we roam;
Far from the kind hearts yonder, far
from our dear old homes;
But ne'er shall we forget, my boys, and
true we'll ever be.
To the girls so kind that we left behind
In Sussex by the sea!

VERSE 6

Sometimes your feet are weary,
sometimes the way is long,
Sometimes the day is dreary, sometimes
the world goes wrong.
But if you let your voices ring, your
cares will fly away,
So we'll sing you a song as we march
along
Of Sussex by the sea!



Sussex by the Sea

● To hear the Anthem go to: [www.royalsussex.org.uk/RSLHG_Music/Sussex by the Sea.mp3](http://www.royalsussex.org.uk/RSLHG_Music/Sussex%20by%20the%20Sea.mp3)

SUSSEX MUSIC

PART ONE

SUSSEX FOLK MUSIC



For those who don't know the county, Sussex is often thought of as a sort of rural adjunct to London with few distinguishing features. Outsiders, or 'furriners' as they're known down here, seldom recognise that Sussex has a cultural identity as unique as any other county, with regional dialects just as impenetrable to the non-native and a wealth of traditional song. Ignorance of Sussex's heritage is probably what prompted Cecil Sharp, founder of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, to pronounce dismissively, 'Sussex is not a distinguished singing county'. Either that, or he had some prejudice against the county – because it's well short of the truth.

The old songs have been passed down by Sussex people themselves, and there's a thriving folk scene in many parts of the county. Local characters have achieved heroic status, and distinguished folk musicians have carried the torch.

Sussex is a rural county and its long coastline is peopled by fishermen as well as ice cream salesmen and hoteliers. And it's the ordinary people who create the folk tradition, so we have a large body of rustic songs and dances, and a good smattering of songs about the sea too.

But folk music in Sussex has remained a living tradition, not just a preservation of the past. The 1960s saw yet another folk song revival, in Sussex perhaps more than elsewhere, with a plethora of folk clubs and pubs rediscovering the folk heritage of the county and updating it for the pop era. Several Sussex folkies achieved almost rock-star status, and many of the trailblazers of the subsequent 'folk-rock' movement had Sussex connections. Interest has continued into the 21st century, and there's no sign of it abating.

Not a 'distinguished singing county'?



THE BROADWOOD COLLECTION

OLD ENGLISH SONGS

One of the by-products of the Romantic movement of the 19th century was a middle-class fascination with folklore, which in turn prompted the so-called ‘folk revival’ in Victorian Britain. The truth is that folk didn’t need any revival – it was alive and kicking, as it had been for centuries – but was only just being discovered and appreciated by the educated classes.

Fearful that rural traditions and music would be lost in the accelerating industrialisation and urbanisation, a new breed of enthusiasts set out, like butterfly collectors, to track down and capture the old ways and tunes for posterity. In the vanguard of this bid to preserve our folklore were a number of clergymen who had been posted to rural parishes. In Sussex, two country parsons stand out for their efforts in this endeavour: the Reverend W. D. Parish, who was curate at Firle, and later vicar of Selmeston and Alciston, whose *Dictionary of the Sussex Dialect* was published in 1875; and the Reverend John Broadwood of Lyne House (between Rusper and Capel on the Sussex-Surrey border north of Horsham), who published his collection of *Old English Songs* in 1843 – perhaps the first such collection of traditional music.

Broadwood was the grandson of the founding father of the Broadwood piano-making business in London, and his family moved to Sussex when he was a child. Growing up in Sussex, he got to know the local songs, as he recollects in the subtitle he gave his anthology:

as now Sung by the Peasantry of the Weald of Surrey and Sussex, and collected by one who has learnt them by hearing them Sung every Christmas from early Childhood, by The Country People, who go about to the Neighbouring Houses, Singing, ‘Waissailing’ as it is called, at that Season. The Airs are set to Music, exactly as they are now Sung, to rescue them from oblivion, and to

afford a specimen of genuine Old English Melody: and the words are given in their original rough state, with an occasional slight alteration to render the sense intelligible.

His niece, Lucy Etheldred Broadwood (1858-1929), followed in his footsteps, collecting songs herself from the late 1890s, and lived for a time in the Broadwood family home, Lyne House. She was a contemporary of Cecil Sharp, and shared with him a passion for folk song and a scholarly approach to the subject (she was one of the first to use the phonograph to record her findings), and the results of her research were published in the anthologies *Sussex Songs*, *English County Songs* and *English Traditional Songs & Carols*. She also helped to form the Folk Song Society in 1898 and served as its secretary and later editor of its *Journal*. She was honoured for her work by being elected President of the Society in 1928, just a year before her death.

Classical collectors

The Broadwoods started the ball rolling, encouraging folk-song enthusiasts such as W. Percy Merrick, George Butterworth and Francis Jekyll to explore the Sussex repertoire. Also swept along in the wave of collectors were a few 'classical' musicians, among them Percy Grainger and Ralph Vaughan Williams – who both had Sussex connections (more about them in Part Two, see pages 40 and 34). Grainger was rather cavalier in his appropriation of the folk melodies he had recorded from all over the world, including arrangements of old Sussex tunes such as *The Merry King* and the *Sussex Mummers' Christmas Carol*. Vaughan Williams, however, took the whole business more seriously: he knew the Broadwood collection well – he even had Lucy Broadwood sing examples at lectures he gave on English folk tunes – and was so respected as a serious and meticulous collector that the library at Cecil Sharp House is now known as the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library.

Top Places

- ① *Rusper churchyard, burial place of the Broadwood family*
- ② *Rusper church, which has a plaque dedicated to Lucy's memory – adorned with a wreath by the local Morris side, the Broadwood Men, in a ceremony held every Mayday*

HORSHAM FOLK

MARKET TOWN MUSIC

Probably because of the presence of the Broadwoods in the area, most of the traditional Sussex music collected in the early days of the folk revival came from around Horsham. No doubt there was just as much going on elsewhere in the county – W. Percy Merrick did track down a few tunes from Henry Hills (c.1831-1901) down the road in Lodsworth, near Petworth – but it was the singers and players of Horsham who attracted the most attention.

The real giant of the time was Henry Burstow (1826-1916). A shoemaker by trade, and a singer, bellringer and storyteller by inclination, Burstow had an encyclopedic knowledge of traditional songs and ‘broad-side ballads’, with a repertoire of over 400 tunes. He met Lucy Broadwood in the 1890s, and she was immediately impressed with not only his memory but also his singing voice. Burstow gave her a list of the songs he knew and over the years she had him sing them to her, later publishing many of them in her book of *English Traditional Songs & Carols* in 1908. Not content with being immortalised in Broadwood’s collection, and needing a spot of cash to help in his later years, Burstow also wrote the wonderfully entertaining *Reminiscences of Horsham*, published in 1911, ‘being the Recollections of Henry Burstow The Celebrated Bellringer and Songsinger... together with a list of the 400 and odd Songs he sings from memory’.

It was Henry’s singing, recommended by Broadwood, that brought Ralph Vaughan Williams back to Sussex in the early years of the 20th century, but he discovered more than Burstow in Horsham. In Monk’s Gate, a few miles south of the town, he came across Harriet Verrall, who sang him several of the songs she had grown up with. She provided a couple of the best known Sussex tunes arranged by Vaughan Williams: the *Sussex Carol* (‘On Christmas night all Christians sing’), and the

traditional melody for ‘Welcome Sailor’ (and also for ‘The Blacksmith’), now better known as the tune for Bunyan’s ‘He who would valiant be’ and dubbed *Monk’s Gate* by its collector. He also wrote a *Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes*, no doubt inspired by his visits to Horsham.

Traditional music in Sussex was not confined to singing: most villages had a band to accompany their dances, which often played in church too. In Warnham, just north of Horsham, the band was led by Michael Turner (1796-1885), fiddler. Like Burstow, Turner was a cobbler and bellringer, and played at Burstow’s wedding, so the two men more than likely shared some music too, but the instrumental music was not considered ‘traditional’ enough to figure in the Broadwoods’ collections.

Horsham was at the forefront of the later folk revival of the 1960s too, thanks largely to the efforts of musician and writer Tony Wales (1925-2007). As far back as 1953, he started the first folk club in Sussex, the Horsham Songswappers, later becoming the Horsham Folk Club which is still meeting regularly, and in 1957 recorded the first album of traditional Sussex songs with his friend Peter Baxter on guitar. Throughout his career, Tony wrote more than 40 books on Sussex folk music and customs, and even a guide to the dialect, but still found time to run his barn dance band, the Derrydowners.

The Halls of Horsham

There’s a nice feeling of continuity about folk music in Horsham, epitomised by the story of the Hall family. Mabs Hall and her son Gordon only started singing in public in the 1980s, encouraged by Bob Copper. Mabs, born in 1900 in Wivelsfield to a musical family, married and moved to London after World War I. Gordon was born there in 1932, and the family moved to Leeds and later Swansea, but returned to Sussex in 1939, settling first in 34 The Bishopric, Horsham – which by delightful coincidence had once been the home of Henry Burstow.

Top Places

- ① *Monk’s Gate, home of Harriet Verrall*
- ① *Warnham, home of Michael Turner*

Top Read

- ① *Henry Burstow’s Reminiscences of Horsham*

MEET THE COPPERS

THE COPPER FAMILY

What Henry Burstow did for Sussex music in the first folk song revival, the Copper family did in the subsequent one. And where the focus had been on Horsham and West Sussex, from the 1950s attention was drawn eastwards across the county to the Coppers' home village of Rottingdean.

In fact, the Coppers had not been overlooked by the early folk song collectors; the family had been well known locally as singers of unaccompanied songs since the beginning of the 19th century, and were 'discovered' by Kate Lee in 1898. Lee, although one of the founders of the Folk Song Society, unfortunately did not have as high a profile as Lucy Broadwood or Vaughan Williams, so her discovery was somewhat overshadowed, and remained relatively neglected, except by the cognoscenti, for another 50 years.

The two singers she came across were James 'Brasser' Copper (1845-1924), who worked on the farms of the village squire, and his brother Thomas (c.1847-c.1936), the landlord of the local pub, the Black Horse – which incidentally is still to be found on Rottingdean High Street, and not that much changed since Thomas's day. The brothers were called up to the 'big house' of Sir Edward Carson QC where Lee was visiting. More used to singing at home with the family, or in Thomas's inn, they suddenly found themselves minor celebrities; Lee was inspired to set up the Folk Song Society, and made the brothers honorary founder members, but this went largely unnoticed – certainly in Rottingdean.

Nevertheless, their brief stardom brought them some recognition, and ensured that what had hitherto been an oral tradition was being written down. James in particular made a point of writing out the words to his songs with his idiosyncratic spellings, and encouraging the family (and indeed the whole village) to carry on the old traditions.

This they did with enthusiasm. Brassler (as his grandson Bob remarked once, you don't need a degree in metallurgy to work out how he got the nickname) had two sons, John (*c.1879-1952*) and Jim (*1882-1954*) who eagerly followed in their father's (and uncle's) footsteps, and did so for the love of singing rather than any chance of fame, as by the turn of the century they were pretty much forgotten by anybody outside Rottingdean. John was a shepherd and Jim a carter who went on to take over as Bailiff of the farms after his father retired, so music-making was very much an amateur occupation for the family. With four powerful Copper voices the harmonised singing in the 'Black Un' became a Saturday night attraction, earning them much-appreciated free beers as well as a strong local following.

And so it went on, through World War I and into the 1920s, with the next generation joining in. But between the two world wars, the area around Rottingdean began to change rapidly: the farms were in decline, and land was being sold off for housing. Farm workers like Jim Copper had to find alternative work – he became a blacksmith and carpenter, but his brother John remained a shepherd – and the old ways were disappearing. Except in one respect: the family remained in close contact, taking every opportunity for a sing, and Jim was determined the tradition shouldn't peter out. He, like his father had done before, wrote down nearly a hundred of the family songs in a book dedicated to his children, Topsy (Frances Joyce) and Trooper (Bob), in 1936.

Brassler died in 1924, but was to be succeeded by his grandchildren: John's son Walter Ronald, known as Ron (*c.1913-79*), and Jim's son Bob (*1915-2004*). Interest in folk song was by then on the wane with the rise in popularity of the gramophone and wireless and, apart from in some small rural pockets of the county such as Rottingdean, the old songs were not being performed anywhere. Undeterred, the Coppers continued to carry the torch, with the quartet of Jim, John, Ron and Bob still meeting regularly to sing together – but more for their own satisfaction than for an audience. Bob had by then joined the police and moved to West Sussex, but made regular trips back to complete the quartet. Even World War II failed to break up the musical partnership.

SUSSEX MUSIC

Did you realise that Claude Debussy wrote his haunting 'La Mer' in an Eastbourne hotel room? That Winifred Wagner, wife to Siegfried was born in Hastings? That Sussex is the only county to have its own anthem - 'Sussex by the Sea'? Sussex has a lot to offer the music lover from folk purist via opera buff to jazz freak and pop fan, so let's not let the county go unsung.



*'So let your voices ring my boys, and take the time from me
And I'll sing you a song as we march along
Of Sussex by the sea.'*

WILLIAM WARD-HIGGS

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ISBN 978-1-906022-10-5



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