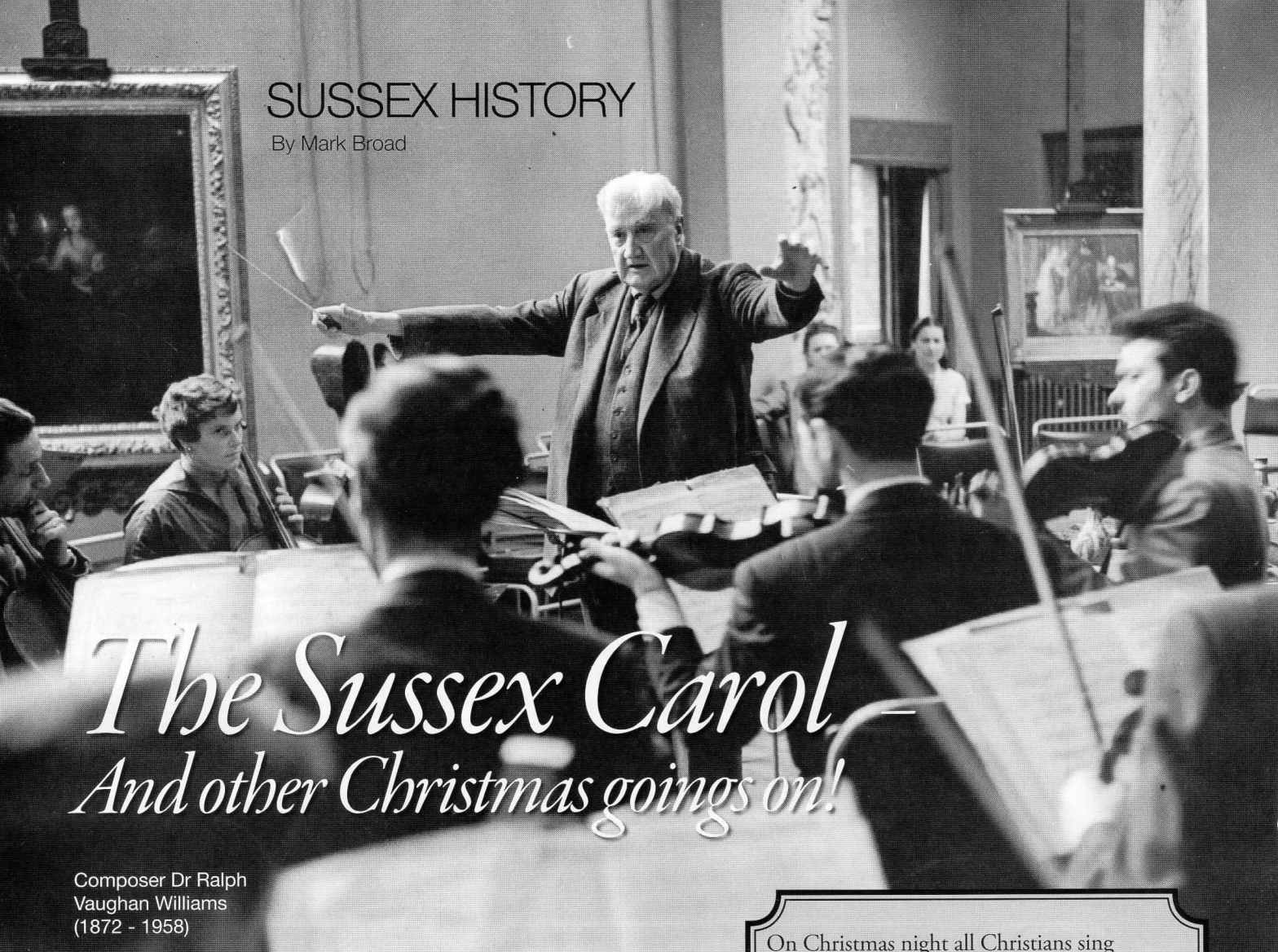


# SUSSEX HISTORY

By Mark Broad



## *The Sussex Carol And other Christmas goings on!*

Composer Dr Ralph  
Vaughan Williams  
(1872 - 1958)

**K**NOWN TO MANY BY its first line “On Christmas night all Christians sing”, this is an old song that only became associated with Sussex because it was ‘collected’ at Monk’s Gate, near Horsham, by composer Ralph Vaughan Williams who, with his astute mastery of harmonisation and instinctive feel for the freedom and mystery in folk melodies, made an arrangement that became popular. The verse was first published in the year 1684 as part of the ‘Small Garland of Pious and Godly Songs’ by Luke Wadding, an Irish bishop. No-one knows whether it had a similar tune or any tune at all in those days.

Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) went to school in Rottingdean. As a young composer he studied with Max Bruch and Maurice Ravel but also he was one of the English song collectors who toured the countryside in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, gathering and notating treasures from the oral tradition of working people’s verse and music. Later he served as president of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, indeed the library at Cecil

Sharp House – home of EFDSS in London – is named in his honour. Cecil Sharp himself retrieved an example of the same Christmas song, on his travels in Herefordshire – so the story could have gone a different way!

Harriett Verrall lived at Monk’s Gate with Peter her husband and both were known locally as singers with a great store of songs. Folk historian and Horsham resident Tony Wales reported their son remembering Vaughan Williams visiting the Verrall’s home armed with early phonograph recording equipment as well as his manuscript paper.

Vaughan Williams would tend to tag a good tune with the name of the village where he collected it. So why isn’t the Sussex Carol called Monk’s Gate? The answer is that Mrs Verrall was the source of another great tune which took that name in Vaughan Williams’s

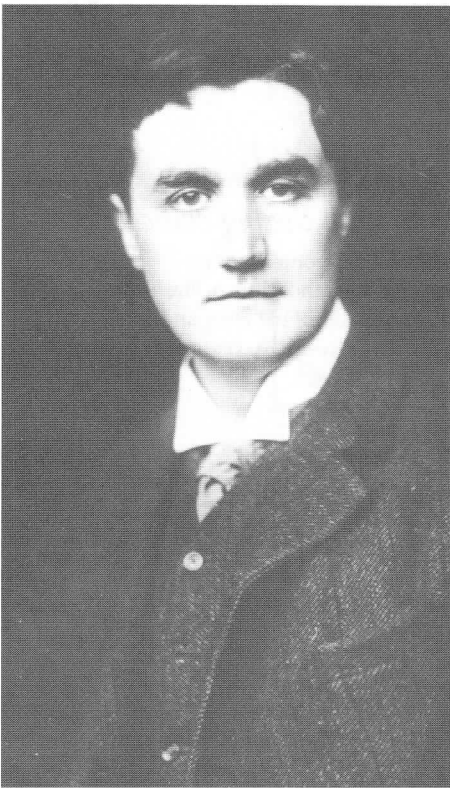
On Christmas night all Christians sing  
To hear the news the angels bring  
*On Christmas night all Christians sing  
To hear the news the angels bring*  
News of great joy, news of great mirth  
News of our merciful King’s birth.

Then why should men on earth be so sad  
Since our Redeemer made us glad  
*Then why should men on earth be so sad  
Since our Redeemer made us glad*  
When from our sin he set us free  
All for to gain our liberty.

When sin departs before His grace  
Then life and health come in its place  
*When Sin departs before His grace  
Then life and health come in its place*  
Angels and men with joy may sing  
All for to see the newborn King.

From out of the darkness we have light  
Which made the angels sing this night  
*From out of the darkness we have light  
Which made the angels sing this night*  
Glory to God and peace to men  
Now and forever more Amen.





Eminent composer and folk-song collector, Ralph Vaughan Williams

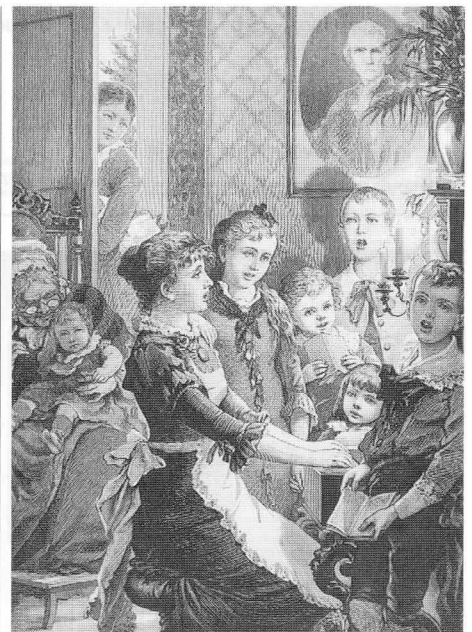


notebook. It was her rendition of 'Our Captain Calls All Hands' that provided Vaughan Williams with the melody for his setting of John Bunyan's verse 'To Be A Pilgrim'. That well-known tune has been listed as 'Monk's Gate' ever since, having appeared as such in The English Hymnal (1906 – Editor: Ralph Vaughan Williams).

The Sussex Carol features in Vaughan

Williams's Fantasia on Christmas Carols, alongside another beautifully-arranged folk melody, "The Truth From Above".

And so, with thoughts of "Gracious! Has another year flown by?" we approach again the Yuletide, season of mince pies (now available all year round) and goodwill to all (less easily obtainable). We can hope for peace, at least, and perhaps each do some little thing towards it. Come the time, I always try to catch the broadcast on Christmas Eve of Nine



Lessons and Carols from the chapel of King's College Cambridge. The Sussex Carol often is included and for me it's the

**Vaughan Williams would tend to tag a good tune with the name of the village where he collected it**

moment when I can begin truly to feel the Christmas spirit kindling, even though I may have been assisting schools with carols and music for nativity plays since November.

*Best wishes to everyone for a happy new year.*

**Sussex Carol**  
On Christmas Night, All Christians Sing

[www.traditionalmusic.co.uk](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk)

On Christmas night all Christians sing, To hear the news the angels bring,  
On Christmas night all Christians sing, To hear the news the angels bring,  
News of great joy news of great mirth, News of our Redeemer's birth