

# Sussex Film Festival



## History of the Sussex Film Festival

The Festival was founded in 1970 by the late Leslie Rodgers of Chailey to give amateur filmmakers throughout Sussex an opportunity to show their productions and have them appraised by a panel of eminent cinematographers from outside the county. It was the first county festival, but the idea has since been copied by Surrey, Kent and others.

The early festivals were held in the Big Hall of the Martletts in Burgess Hill, but declining attendances forced a move to Wivelsfield Village Hall in 1981. In 1998 the venue was changed to the Adastral Hall to benefit from a more central and easier accessed location and improved lighting facilities, but in 2002 it reverted to Wivelsfield Village Hall following complaints about the Adastral's acoustics and also building work going on at the site, restricting access.

For a great many years the Festival Chairman was David Heath of Burgess Hill who was known in ciné circles as 'Mister Sussex'. He retired in 1991 and was succeeded by Reg Townsend from Brighton, an ex-chairman of The Institute of Amateur Cinematographers, the national organisation. Ian Wingate of Worthing took over the post in 1997 then Angela Weston from Eastbourne in January 2001, followed by a second spell for Reg Townsend from 2003. Our current Chairman from 2005 is, once again, Ian Wingate.

There have been enormous technical changes over the forty years. At the first festivals many of the entries were on standard 8mm cine film with soundtracks on separate tapes, the reel-to-reel tape recorder being linked to the cine projector by various ingenious devices to keep. By the late seventies super 8mm film had become universal with the soundtrack on a magnetic stripe down the side of the film.

This ensured perfect synchronization, but sound was still only added when the film was otherwise completed. The eighties were the heyday of the single sound cine camera which records sounds at the same time as pictures and let amateur film makers and actors begin to collaborate in producing short feature films. 1988 saw the first video entry and videos have now virtually eliminated films. Amateurs can now achieve nearly all the special effects seen on television.

But through all these developments one aspect has remained constant. The Festival entrants may be amateurs, but their entries have never been amateurish. The stock image of home movies as never ending views of family on beach with the camera wobbling all over the place has no relevance to these productions. Apart from a high standard of picture and sound, the comedies and dramas are well acted and scripted while the documentaries and travelogues have been researched and have genuinely interesting commentaries. Obviously there are limits; amateurs can't employ thousands of extras, or wait six months for a pregnant giraffe to give birth, but within these limits they are thoroughly professional.

If you don't believe it, come to the next festival and see for yourself.

*Richard Mercer*