

## **The Honorary Graduand: Mary Dhonau OBE HonRICS**

The Orator: Dr Jackie Rogers

### **Mary Dhonau is to be awarded the Honorary Degree of Honorary Doctor of Science.**

Mary Dhonau studied singing at the Royal College of Music, and was combining working as a professional soprano with bringing up a large family when her Worcestershire home was repeatedly flooded with raw sewage. Many of her neighbours were also flooded, but it was Mary who led the fight that eventually succeeded in making the water company accept responsibility. She was delighted to be asked to officially open the £1.3 million sewage pumping station that was ultimately built to remedy the problem. (She did however, decline the kind invitation to name it after her!) During the floods of 2007, however, the pumping station was overwhelmed due to a power failure and Mary's home was flooded again. As she had made her home flood resilient (waterproof) in the intervening years, on this occasion she did not need to make an insurance claim and the family was displaced for only 3 weeks.

Mary was responsible for developing the blueprint for community engagement in this sphere, focussing on working with (rather than against) the agencies that manage flood risk. She has been promoting this ethos for many years and it has now been adopted by government as 'best practice'. Over the years she has supported the formation of many community flood groups, enabling local people to have a say in how floods are managed.

Mary was involved with the National Flood Forum from its inception, holding the post of Chief Executive for a number of years. She went on to become Chief Executive of the 'Know Your Flood Risk' campaign, as well as Chair of the Flood Protection Group for the Property Care Association and a member of the Regional Flood and Coastal committee for Anglian Northern. She also runs a consultancy (MD Associates) specialising in raising awareness of flood risk, mitigation measures and flood recovery. She regularly works alongside Local Authorities conducting community engagement events, most recently playing a key role in the highly successful 'Pathfinder Project' on surface water risk for Northamptonshire County Council. She also works closely with the flood insurance sector, promoting working practices which improve the experience of their customers.

Mary represents the 'voice of the flood victim' at government level, and is always in much demand to appear on national television and radio during flood events. In addition, she is a popular speaker at national and international conferences on flood risk management. Her publications include the Guide to Flood Recovery and the Home Owners Guide to Flood Resilience; a Four-step guide to preparing a Household Emergency plan. She has been a valued contributor to a number of academic studies. Mary was awarded an OBE in 2009 in recognition of her work with flood victims. She has recently been awarded honorary membership of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, in recognition of her high profile in championing

the public interest regarding flooding. Mary was recently presented with the 'Voice of the Customer' award at the prestigious Chartered Institute of Insurance Public Interest Award ceremony. She has also gained the affectionate sobriquet of 'Mary Queen of Floods'.

The Honorary Degree is awarded in recognition of Mary Dhonau's outstanding national contribution to flood risk management.