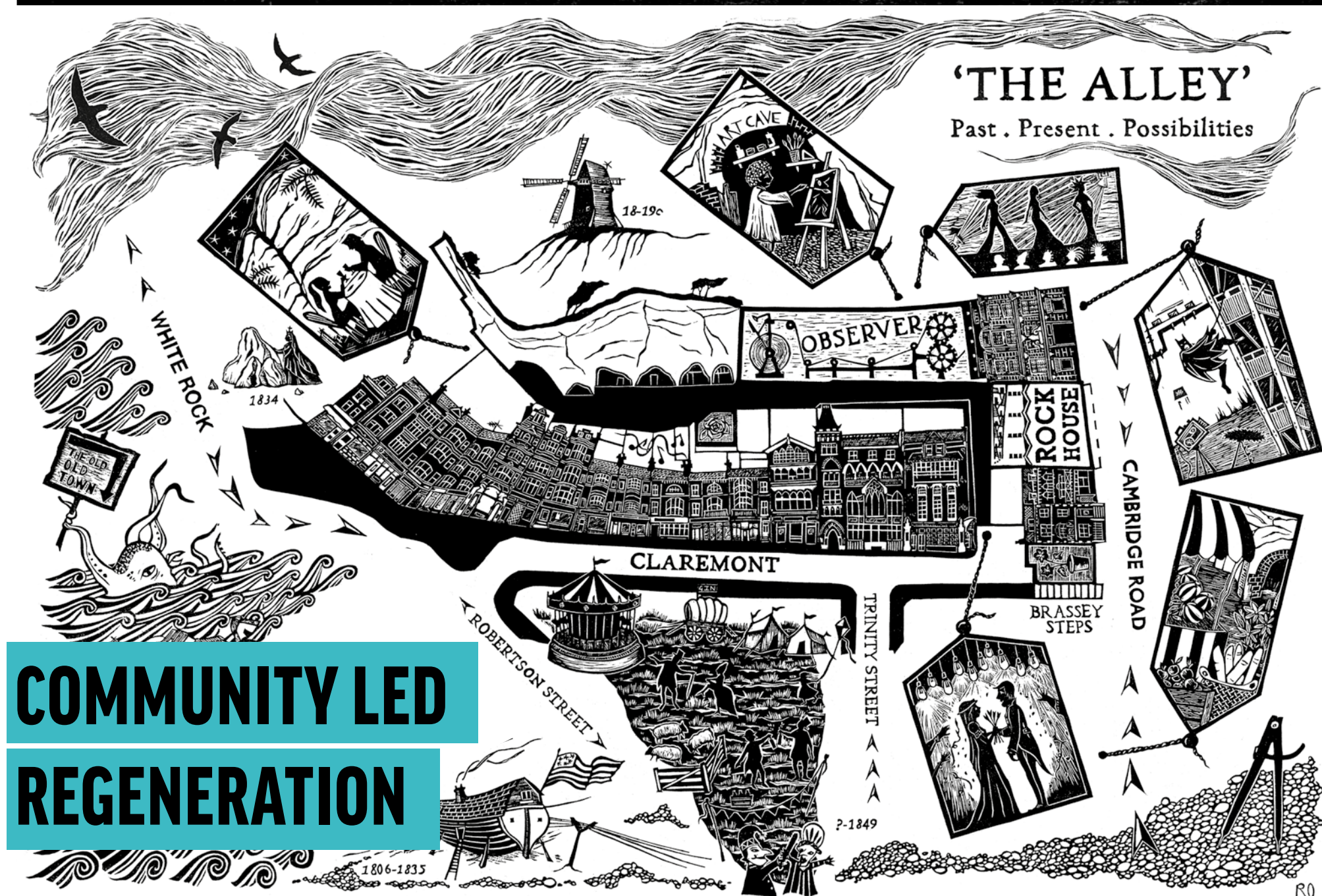


The Commoner

TRINITY TRIANGLE HERITAGE ACTION ZONE EDITION



COMMUNITY LED REGENERATION

TRINITY TRIANGLE HERITAGE ACTION ZONE (TTHAZ), WHICH BEGAN IN APRIL 2020, IS A 4-YEAR PROGRAMME LED BY HASTINGS COMMONS AND FUNDED BY HISTORIC ENGLAND.

The programme came from many years of local work rooted in the White Rock neighbourhood. Suffering from serious poverty and areas of extreme dereliction, the area was also under threat of gentrification – a process that has gained ground in the past few years.

The TTHAZ programme aimed to help tackle those issues and to encourage diverse and idiosyncratic expressions of local pride to celebrate the distinctiveness of this area. This has included supporting the restoration of the Observer Building, 12 Claremont, His Place, Holy Trinity,

Debenhams, Leyla's and (soon) 7 Claremont, while experimenting with a Maintenance Club to keep the rest of the neighbourhood in better nick. This 'built fabric' work has run in parallel with support for 'neighbourhood stories', funding a long list of local creative and cultural activity

relating to the area from performances, books and window displays to Wondergolf and Frock Up Friday.

Illustration by Rowena O'Reilly.

Read on to discover more about the programme and this astonishing little neighbourhood.

TALKING HISTORY

The White Rock area is the site of the original Saxon settlement of ‘Hesting’. However, with its natural harbour prone to silting, the area was abandoned after William I built the castle to the east. Over the centuries it continued to silt up becoming ‘sea beach’ and this unowned land was occupied by squatters and artisans. The area became known as the America Ground but was vested in the Crown after a public inquiry in 1827 (see p7). The inhabitants were cleared from the land in the mid 1830s after which it became known as ‘the Derelict Lands’ before being leased to Patrick Robertson in 1849. He developed it rapidly, with all the key streets laid out by 1859.

The FJ Parsons Hastings Observer empire began initially at 12 Claremont before building, in liaison with Thomas Brassey, the superb collection of Grade II listed buildings that now form the Library and the Printworks. When the latter ran out of space, FJ Parsons was advised to move out of town. Instead, in the early 1920s, they carved the massive Observer Building into the

White Rock cliff face, creating a ‘talkative’ façade and brick-lining the ancient tunnels to use for storage. The firm continued to expand, extending the building southwards and adding another floor, and then in 1969 adding the 9-storey block that is now Rock House. Plans to add further blocks down as far as Brassey Steps, were cut short by the collapse of the print industry in the 1980s. With the sale and then closure of the Parsons empire, all their buildings were left to fall into a state of neglect and dereliction, impacting the surrounding area for several decades.

“Robertson Street, Claremont and Trinity Street... became the commercial centre of the new town during the 1860s. The distinctive radial pattern, with Havelock Road curving north to the railway station, established a central focus for the town.”

Conservation Area Appraisal - Central Hastings, Hastings Borough Council 2017

“As one of only two community-led high street HAZ schemes in the country, Hastings Commons has led the way with a flexible approach that allowed the team to secure and spend funding at pace, adapt during the Covid-19 pandemic, and deliver new projects as needs arose.

Hastings stands out thanks to its innovative approach to the reuse of historic buildings for the benefit of those on low incomes - it's really putting ‘regeneration without gentrification’ into action. It's such an innovative and creative programme that we've been sharing many of the approaches used here with other schemes across the country, to better deliver tangible improvements to our historic high streets.”

Alma Howell, Historic England

TALKING REGENERATION

There are many independent small businesses in the Triangle, giving the area a creative bohemian feel, but they suffer from a historic and enduring lack of footfall. This is the second poorest part of Hastings, with ‘multiple deprivation’ in the worst 1% nationally and worsening. It has extremely high levels of private rented stock (82% in 2021, compared to 29% Hastings, 18% England). With rents and house prices rising very fast since

2019, many people are unable to afford good quality, stable homes. The need to tackle the dereliction is imperative, but doing so risks intensifying gentrification, potentially destroying the diversity and heritage of the area.

In 2019 Heart of Hastings CLT (now Hastings Commons CLT) led a partnership of locally rooted and allied organisations to bid for a Heritage Action Zone for the Trinity Triangle, driven by a shared mission to protect and enhance

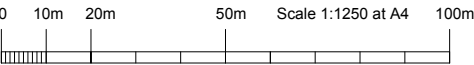
the neighbourhood while taking action to build in affordability and inclusion for the long term.

Unlike many council-led programmes TTHAZ was not designed as an open, undecided grants programme but rather, based on more than a decade of sustained community engagement, a series of planned and interconnected investments to progress significant change in the neighbourhood, while retaining its character and diversity.



Within White Rock (which includes the seafront and pier, White Rock Gardens, the Convent and the Oval, Cambridge Road and Cornwallis Gardens, ESK and Priory Street), the Trinity Triangle is particularly special. It has an astonishing history, fantastic architecture, and a strong independent vibe.

- CORE CAPITAL PROJECTS
SHOVEL-READY, COMMUNITY-LED, HIGH IMPACT
- HIGH PRIORITY SPACE
- PUBLIC REALM ENHANCEMENTS
- POINTS OF INTEREST
- LISTED BUILDING



AIMS, ACTIVITIES & IMPACT



1

- 1 Improve physical appearance by tackling dereliction and renovating historic buildings.**
- 2 Develop local skills, knowledge & capacity in heritage renovation and interpretation.**
- 3 Boost the local economy by creating all kinds of productive and social spaces to encourage new footfall, increasing dwell time and visitor spend.**
- 4 Enhance understanding and enjoyment of local heritage for a wide range of people.**

TO ACHIEVE A TRINITY TRIANGLE THAT:

- has been shaped by local people and businesses who work collaboratively and are confident in their ongoing management of this special, historic neighbourhood
- is no longer derelict but retains its character and diversity and remains a landscape suffused with extraordinary stories
- is recognised and valued, affordable and inclusive, and hugely successful with widespread profits that benefit the immediate area and success sustained beyond the lifetime of the HAZ programme

SEVEN OBJECTIVES

The national High Street Heritage Action Zone scheme has the following aims:

1

Revitalise historic high streets by investing in the repair and restoration of vacant or underutilised heritage assets and public realm assets

2

Address changing consumer demands by using the local historic character and distinctiveness to differentiate the high street from competitors and **provide unique and memorable experiences**

3

Add economic value over the long term by creating and facilitating new employment and training opportunities which can be taken up by local people

4

Invest in clusters of historic buildings and the associated public realm, **and stimulate new private investments in mixed commercial, leisure, residential and community uses**

5

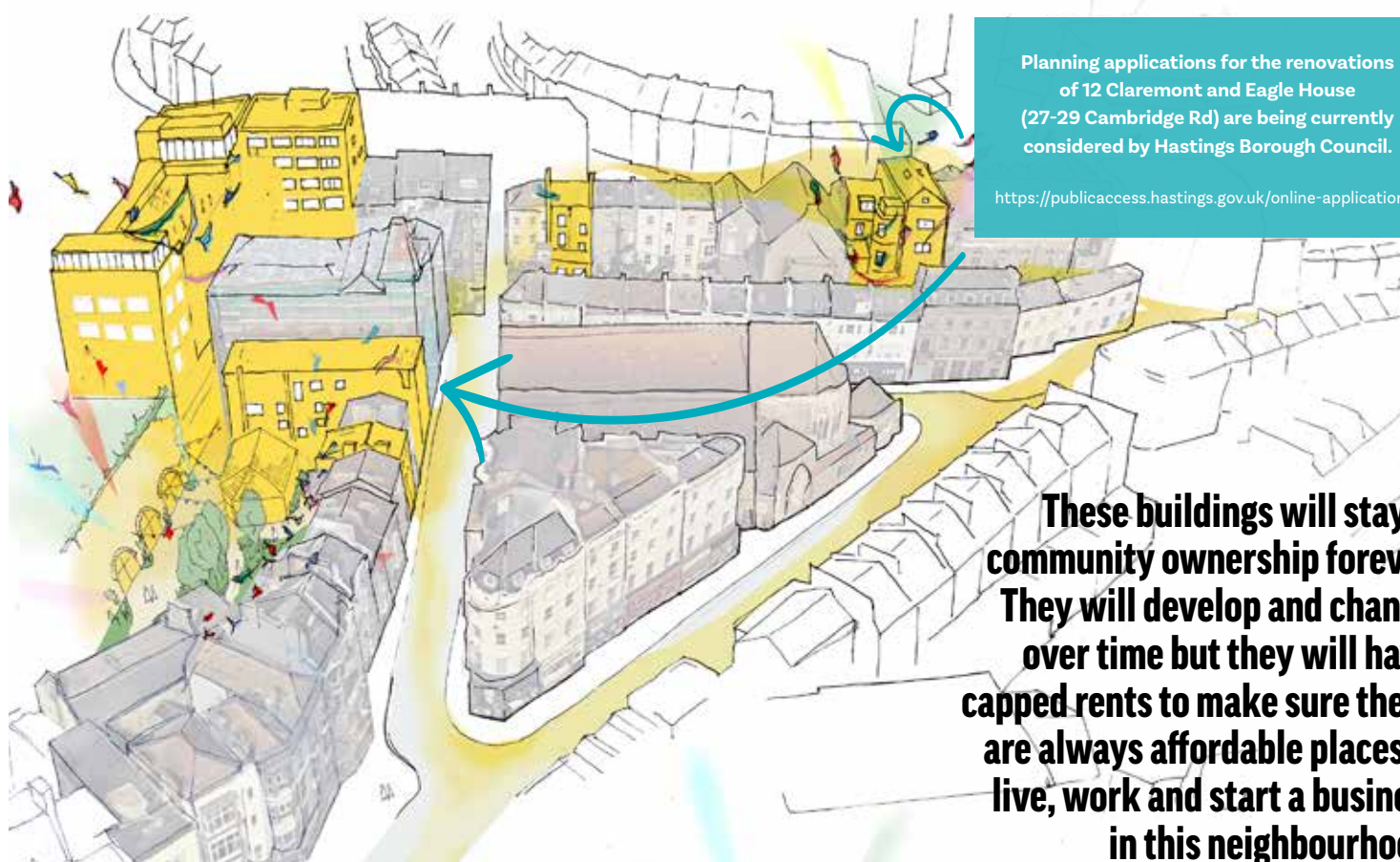
Work with local communities to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the heritage on their high streets

6

Work with local businesses and communities to ensure that local needs, knowledge, insight and narratives drive the local investment programme

7

Create public value through effective use of public resources and through influencing existing or planned **regeneration initiatives to maximise their wider socio-economic benefits**



Planning applications for the renovations of 12 Claremont and Eagle House (27-29 Cambridge Rd) are being currently considered by Hastings Borough Council.

<https://publicaccess.hastings.gov.uk/online-applications/>

These buildings will stay in community ownership forever. They will develop and change over time but they will have capped rents to make sure there are always affordable places to live, work and start a business in this neighbourhood.

THE TTHAZ PROGRAMME



BUILDINGS

The programme focused on two key buildings – the **Observer Building** and **12 Claremont** – but also provided support to other owners.

- After 35 years of dereliction grant support from the TTHAZ was critically important in achieving restoration of the **Observer Building**. Four floors of this great historic building are now open and active, with work continuing to the facade, roof and other floors
- Long delays with the lease on **12 Claremont** pushed the project back but plans have now been submitted for a full renovation, to transform this derelict, historically-important building into a fully inclusive creative hub with Project Art Works
- The **caves and cliff-face** in the Lower Alley have been stabilised, opening up new public realm
- Grant support to restore important features (fan windows in the old **Debenhams** building, **Leyla’s Bar** door and window, shopfront at **7 Claremont**) and to help fundraising for **His Place** and **Holy Trinity Hastings**
- Development of the Trinity Triangle Maintenance Club (see p6)



DERELICTION



RENOVATION

LEARNING & DIGITAL

Supporting new employment, training and creative technology opportunities with the local community to develop greater understanding of high street heritage.

- Kickstart work placements, HAZ steward training, America Ground tours
- Development of OBX Creative Technology Hub with projects like People of Hastings and the Virtual Triangle (see p5)



Photograph of Mark Duncan 3D scan Mummer is by ZEROH



THE ORIGINAL PROGRAMME HAD 12 ELEMENTS – A MIX OF THINGS WE KNEW WERE NEEDED FROM YEARS OF LOCAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ALONGSIDE MORE OPEN, INVESTIGATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL WORK. IT HAS EVOLVED INTO FOUR STRANDS – BUILDINGS, STORIES, LEARNING & DIGITAL, AND LEGACY.

NEIGHBOURHOOD STORIES

A big strand of the programme has been support for cultural activities that reveal and celebrate local neighbourhood stories, involving local community groups and creatives.

- 25 projects have been funded including:
- The Big ADVENTure by Hattie Spice (advent art installation in shop windows)
 - Wondergolf in the Observer Building
 - We Dig Hastings – pioneering time bank initiative as part of Garden Town project
 - Arts on Prescription mural tiles in the Alley Gardens



LEGACY & EVALUATION

A short-term programme must always be looking at the next steps. How will the activities and impact be sustained? How can we use the lessons to improve local regeneration in the future?

- Using a range of evaluation approaches to capture impact and collect, review and respond to feedback about the programme
- Developing a legacy beyond March 2024 to continue supporting community-led heritage-focused regeneration in and beyond the Trinity Triangle

Trinity Triangle is going through another historic change - everybody can help shape the future.





Exhibition installation by ZEROH.

SPOTLIGHT ON

OBX

OBX IS A LONG-TERM CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY PROJECT OPERATING OUT OF THE MEZZANINE FLOOR OF THE OBSERVER BUILDING. IT EXPLORES THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY IN BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES.

“PEOPLE WHO DON'T CARE ABOUT TECH WERE ENGAGED FOR THE FIRST TIME AND ACROSS GENERATIONS. THEY WERE ABLE TO SEE AND EXPERIENCE THINGS SUCH AS THE 3D PRINTERS IN PERSON. THIS MIGHT SOUND SIMPLE BUT IT IS AN IMPORTANT APPROACH TO HELPING PEOPLE IMAGINE DIFFERENT FUTURES.” Resources for Change evaluation report, 2022



TTHAZ funding has supported early development of this open, accessible, inclusive community inspired project. The goal of OBX is to make the tools of the often-exclusionary fields of art and technology available for collective action for a better future.

Here are two highlights from the OBX project so far! →



PEOPLE OF HASTINGS PROJECT MAY - OCTOBER 2022

A mass 3D portrait of those who make up Hastings. With creative direction from ZEROH Studio, local people were invited to get 3D-scanned and then printed out as a little 3D model, along with a QR code to access a digital avatar. Results were exhibited online and at a real-world exhibition where people could collect their model.

A series of workshops ran alongside, focused on themes from creative technology, hosted by well-known artists of the genre: Andrew Kotting on VR in his film work, game programming for kids, digital painting with Roz Hall and workshops with looked-after young people in the Get Digital project.



VIRTUAL TRIANGLE NOVEMBER 2022 - ONGOING

A virtual recreation of the Trinity Triangle area aims to show how new interactive 3D imaging technologies can be used to promote local businesses - cafes, bookshops, pubs, shops - and raise awareness of the unique and distinctive heritage of the Trinity Triangle. The project is using low-cost, new and emerging techniques of photogrammetry to build a detailed three dimensional near-photorealistic model of the Trinity Triangle area.



Scan the QR code to walk through the Virtual Triangle in progress...

Q&A

MAINTENANCE CLUB

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING PROJECTS OF THE TTHAZ IS 'THE MAINTENANCE CLUB' - AN EXPERIMENT IN WHAT COULD HAPPEN IF DIFFERENT OWNERS WERE BROUGHT TOGETHER TO CARE FOR THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AS IF IT WAS A SINGLE STRUCTURE. TRINITY TRIANGLE MAINTENANCE CLUB BEGAN IN 2021 AND HAS GROWN FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH. WE SPOKE TO THE FACILITATOR, DONNA HAYTER, TO FIND OUT MORE...

Question: What is the Maintenance Club?

Answer: It began with an idea from the council's conservation officer. Looking around the Triangle, it became obvious that although there is gentrification underway, there are also a lot of neglected buildings. The buildings generally aren't looked after well and we could see the impact this was having on the area and how it felt for the people who live and work here. We'd seen how disruptive it could be for people trying to run a business when something goes seriously wrong with big leaks and shopfronts falling off. Lots of these issues could be prevented if basic maintenance was carried out regularly. Looking after buildings also helps people be more resilient to climate change and the related increasing bad health as it's much more cost-effective and easier to heat your home if you don't have issues like damp and leaks.

We realised that this kind of 'club' doesn't really exist anywhere else! Big and expensive buildings have maintenance funded through service charges or a management company might do maintenance if they own a whole block of flats. We couldn't find an example to learn from which brought together lots of different owners and people who aren't necessarily connected. So even now it continues to be an experiment to see how many stakeholders we can get to come together to help look after it as an interconnected place.

This challenges the idea that when you own something, it's your individual asset and you can choose to leave it to rot. I think there is a lack of awareness in our culture that owning something makes you part of a community as your property is within a shared neighbourhood.



Question: How does the Maintenance Club work?

Answer: On a basic level - once a year we do a round of maintenance. Local people/businesses have to opt into the Maintenance Club to benefit from it. We started with a core group of 15 people and now there are 26 buildings. We work with lots of different local contractors. We give them a list of buildings and they spend 7-10 days going around and doing the buildings one by one. We've found the best time to do maintenance is at the end of the autumn, before most of the bad winter weather but after the trees have lost their leaves, the birds have made their nests and people have been partying during the summer and throwing rubbish everywhere (strange things end up in gutters!). We do all kinds of small jobs like clearing gutters, checking and cleaning roofs (getting rid of moss and pigeon poo or anything that once wet and sodden could lead to water coming into a building). Last year, we had a little bit of extra money and so we did some extra works like filling in cracks and replacing roof tiles.

Apart from the actual maintenance, we also do surveys. When we started, we did a survey by hand, with people on cherry pickers looking at roofs, but more recently we did a full drone survey. As we've learnt more, we've expanded our ways of working. One of the reasons maintenance isn't being done is because of access - lots of the backs of buildings in the Triangle are tucked away in alleyways so they're difficult to reach. Some of those buildings hadn't had any maintenance done for probably 30 years - it looked like forests growing out the backs of the houses! In response, we found a company that have this Hoover-like equipment that you can get from the ground into awkwardly placed gutters. Hopefully this has made a difference and will make even more of a difference come winter.

Question: Have there been any challenges to the project?

Answer: One of our main challenges has been navigating relationships with contractors. Contractors are so busy and have so much work - we need them more than they need us! It's been an ongoing challenge finding reliable contractors that do good work, are aligned to our values and remain loyal.

It's hard to find out who owns what, and it changes quite frequently. One of the biggest lessons has been how surprisingly hard it is to do things for people for free! It has been really difficult to change the idea that people own their building and don't need to think about anyone else around them. This is not everybody as we have 26 amazing owners who are working together and seeing this area as one place that needs looking after for the benefit of all, but it's quite hard to get through to people who aren't seeing it that way.

Question: As the HAZ draws to a close next year, what are the next steps?

Answer: This is a question I am thinking more about as we come towards the end of the HAZ. We've been able to run the Maintenance Club the past few years because it's been completely funded so we've never had to ask people what role they would be willing to play. Now we're working out how to simplify so people can self-organise. There are exciting possibilities ahead - maybe we could train people to do some of this work as part of a communal maintenance project or involve the college. Whatever happens next, the Maintenance Club has been a brilliant pioneering experiment looking at how we can change people's perceptions from the singular to the plural and work together to look after the places we love.

For more information and to get involved, contact mc@jerichoroad.co.uk

HISTORY OF RESISTANCE

With the old 'Hesting' harbour silting up over the centuries, a shingle bank formed and eventually the ground became sturdy enough for shacks and later brick houses. As Hastings increased in popularity as a resort town, there was a need for more labourers, merchants and traders who settled themselves in the area outside the main town. By the 1820s over 1,000 people were living and working informally on the land. It was nicknamed the 'America Ground' around this time due to the inhabitants' independent claim to the land (they paid no rent as there was no one to pay rent to!) and apparent 'hard living'. However, as Hastings continued to expand, the ownership of this land began to be debated with the Hastings Corporation laying claim to it. Subsequently, a government-organised 'inquisition' took place in 1827 which decided that the Crown owned all the America

Ground as it was based on shingle. The Crown gave the Ground's occupants notice to quit by 1835 and expected them to pay rent during this time (which few did). Legend has it that after hearing the news, the locals raised the Stars and Stripes flag and declared independence, lining themselves up with the rapidly emerging United States of America. Although there is only one report of flying the Stars & Stripes (in 1832 at a major carnival event), the 'declaration of independence' became a myth that continues to be relevant even now...

BRINGING THIS DRAMATIC HISTORY TO LIFE

One of the Neighbourhood Stories projects for 2023-24 will be a musical play about the America Ground, developed by local award-winning writer John Knowles and Bob Tipler, known for the Albion and Fat Tuesday. The

play will combine elements of Les Misérables and Passport to Pimlico with sea shanties, telling a story of storms, blocked harbours, land grabbing, rebellion, and a face-off with authorities. It will acknowledge the current issue of high land prices, reflecting on the historical belief, held by groups like the Diggers and Levellers, that the land should be "a common treasury for all".

John Knowles says, "This historical story is still relevant today as for Fetch, this is more than just a historical musical. It's a chance to shine a light on the current situation common to many sea-side towns, where incoming wealth is unevenly distributed and where local people find themselves unable to live in the place they helped to create."

This play will also be incorporated into a proposed documentary film by Adam Clements of Tree Tunnel Productions, incorporating elements of animation with film of

HOW DID THE 'AMERICA GROUND' GET ITS NAME?
THIS SMALL AREA OF HASTINGS IS SUFFUSED WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY HISTORY OF RESISTANCE THAT OCCURRED DURING THE 1800S. READ ON TO FIND OUT MORE AND HOW THE AMERICA GROUND MYTH IS STILL RELEVANT TODAY...



current residents and clips of the play to document the story of the America Ground, focusing on the enduring legend and embellished accounts passed down over time.

Performance and screening dates will be announced in due course so please keep an eye on @hastingscommons socials for news!

c1580 Local business people receive a large grant from Queen Elizabeth to turn the Priory Valley into a harbour. Only half the grant is spent (on building a sea-defence embankment where Cambridge Road is today) as the grant-receivers disappear with the rest of the money! The embankment plays a key role in the history of the town centre, as it hinders the drainage of the Priory Valley, which remains as simple farmland and marshes for the next two centuries.

1800: A large shipyard and ropewalk is constructed in the America Ground by principal ship-owners - the Breeds family.

1810s Hastings increases in popularity and size as a resort town. This growth needs many new artisans and labourers who move into the America Ground. With nobody officially owning the 'Ground', there is no-one to pay rent to.

1822 The Breeds family buy part of the White Rock hill, cutting it back to form a flat piece of land on which to expand their many business enterprises. This includes making storage caves in the rock face, which still exist today and creating the road Claremont as a link to the beach.

1827 A government-organised 'inquisition' takes place, deciding that the Crown owns all the America Ground (except for the Breeds centre in Claremont). The Crown gives the 1,000+ occupants notice to quit by 1835.

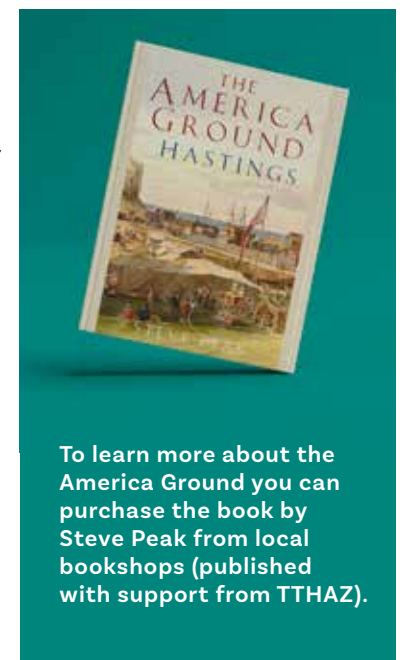
1839 The bridge over the Priory Stream is replaced by a culvert where Harold Place is today. The area around the culvert is surfaced and levelled, creating the open space that became the heart of the town from the 1850s.

1846-51 The railway system comes to town and so does wealthy Scottish businessman,

Patrick Robertson, who realises that the arrival of the railways would turn the Priory Valley into a new town centre. In 1859, he signs a deal with the Crown for a 99 year lease of the Crown land for only £500 p.a. and embarks on transforming the former America Ground into a high-quality residential and shopping district.

1857 The foundation stone of the Holy Trinity Church in Robertson Street is laid.

1876-7 The Brassey Institute (today's Library) and a new print-works for the Hastings Observer are built as a joint project in Claremont.



To learn more about the America Ground you can purchase the book by Steve Peak from local bookshops (published with support from TTHAZ).

CURIOUS AGENDA HAVE CREATED THIS SPECIAL CURIOUS KIDS TRAIL AROUND THE TRINITY TRIANGLE AREA. GET CURIOUS AND SEE WHAT YOU DISCOVER ABOUT THIS HISTORIC PLACE!



1 Peek through the scaffolding that hides the Observer Building. What is written in the original stonework above the front door and windows?

2 Take the Brassey Steps to the next section of the trail. Look around to your left or right, and tell us, what's OUR favourite thing to do? (Hint: It's so nice, it says it twice!) **Bonus question: How many steps are there?**

3 Someone very important attended this Public Hall in 1861. Can you find the Blue Plaque? Who is it dedicated to?

4 On three sides of the monument, outside Holy Trinity Church, there's writing to read. On the fourth, what is there? And where does it lead? Tell us what's on the hidden side of the monument?

5 Go inside Wow & Flutter, and ask the person who works there what this building used to be... The answer may surprise you!

6 Find Gotham Alley, and spot the symbols across the top of the metal gate. What numbers can you find hidden amongst the letters?

7 Find the beautiful tiles hidden in the cave. Which shop used to be Madame Leapman's Old Curiosity Shop? **Bonus question: What is that shop now?**

8 William Caxton, the first man to print books in England, is smiling down at you from the old Printworks above Dyke & Dean. What year was the first book published?

9 Take one step inside the Library, and you'll see a familiar tapestry above your head. How many boats can you spot? **Bonus task: Go inside and talk to the librarian, maybe they know the famous author whose aunt lived in Wellington Square!**

10 Find Cheese-On-Sea, what is their shop front symbol? **Bonus task: Go into the shop and tell the person behind the counter a cheese-related joke or fact... and maybe you'll get a prize!**



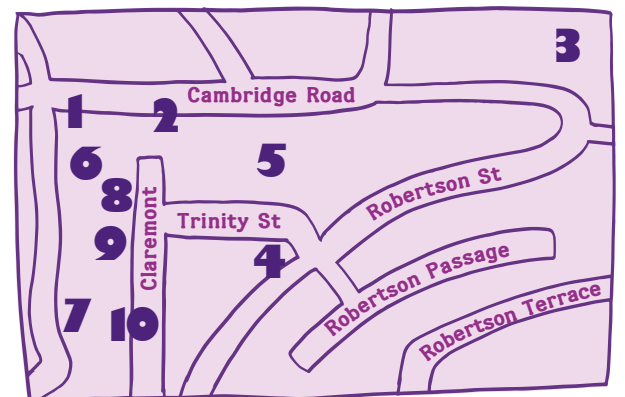
Want to win an extra special prize?

Choose one thing that you discovered in this trail, and turn it into front page news! Tell us the fascinating facts you discovered, and perhaps even write your own story. For example, we would love to see newspaper stories about what YOU think is behind the Holy Trinity Church door...

Or, you could write about Charles Dickens, Emmeline Pankhurst and Alan Turing, or maybe even tell us a whole story about cheese! Whatever you want to write about, we want to read.

The best front page will win an extra curious prize, and your page will even be printed in a real life newspaper!

Scan the QR code to find out the trail answers and for more info!



HISTORIC ENGLAND

Historic England is the Government's statutory advisor on the historic environment and executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department of Culture and Sport. It is the public body that helps people care for, enjoy and celebrate England's spectacular historic environment, from beaches and battlefields to parks and pie shops. They protect, champion and save the places that define who we are and where we've come from as a nation. They care passionately about the stories these places tell, the ideas

they represent, and the people who live, work and play among them.

Working with communities and specialists that share HE's passion, knowledge and skills to inspire interest, care and conservation, so everyone can keep enjoying and looking after the history that surrounds us all.



Historic England

HASTINGS COMMONS

Hastings Commons is a pioneering approach to community led regeneration. Since 2014, we have brought over 8,000 square metres of floor space into custodian ownership across a whole cluster of buildings in the centre of Hastings, renovating them to a high quality, offering genuinely affordable rents,

and supporting residents and businesses to collaborate and take more control of where they live and work.



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