

Hastings Independent

Your local non-profit community newspaper

Hastings Independent Press

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FREE

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'BUDGET FOR HOPE', SAYS COUNCIL LEADER

But higher charges and reduced services are on the way

HUGH SULLIVAN

Hastings Borough Council was due to meet in full session on Wednesday of this week (13 December) with one overwhelming matter to debate – the estimated £4m deficit currently estimated for its 2024/25 budget.

Council leader Paul Barnett has set three “key priorities”: no further dipping into reserves; protecting frontline services; and

“living within our means”. That has left no alternative, he argues, to proposing, as “budget savings”, a series of charges increases and service reductions.

Last week his cabinet approved increases of 7-10% in crematorium fees, 10% across a swathe of car parking charges and beach hut rents, 15% in hire charges for The Oval and other open spaces, and rises of between 20% and 43% in fares on the East Hill and West Hill

lifts. Total income from these changes is calculated to bring in an extra £120,000 for the year.

Cutting services offers much more scope for balancing the budget. That requires either reduction in staffing levels (in particular, not re-filling vacant posts), bringing some previously sub-contracted operations back in-house, or – the council's preferred means of continuing non-statutory functions – finding external funding

sources, agency partners and/or volunteer organisations to share or reduce financial outlays.

In his column in the Hastings Observer last Friday, headed “A budget for hope after a tough year”, Cllr Barnett wrote: “We need to transform the council from a large organisation that tries to do everything into a smaller enabling council that has partnerships as a

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NEWS

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

As regular readers will know, HIP has a fortnightly production schedule. But our troupe of volunteer writers, editors, subs and creatives felt that a short break over the holiday season wouldn't be too much to ask. So there will be a three week gap between this issue and the next, which will be out on 4 January. That means the deadline for submissions for issue 242, will be 27 December. Possibly not the most popular of times to be writing articles or letters for us! But we do want to hear from you. HIP is your newspaper and we invite and welcome your input. In the first instance look at the list of section editors on this page and email suggestions for pieces to the one you think most appropriate.

As for this issue, do read the extraordinary and inspiring story of one person's determination to create a non-secular community space out of a redundant church on p6. The food page offers a challenge for anyone allergic or just averse to the seasonal sprout – p7. The Features pages prompt a quiz question – what does Hastings have in common with Europe's Basque region? Answer on pages 8 and 9. We've been working on expanding and improving the Listings section, which is now an eight-page pull-out for you to keep and refer to if you want to know what's going on around town. Busily competing for space are the Arts and Literature sections which run from pages 10-15, and highlight the controversy over Hastings' own Banksy mural.

We trust there is something for everyone to enjoy over the holidays and with that, we wish you all Seasons Greetings.

Arts Funding Snakes & Ladders

POLLY GIFFORD

The hugely disappointing news that Hastings Fat Tuesday Festival didn't get its funding from Arts Council England (ACE) for 2024 highlights one of the long running problems with the arts funding game. Projects like Fat Tuesday often start the same way. Artists or small organisations, who know what their places and communities need, have a great idea and make it happen on a wave of enthusiasm, creativity and very little cash. It goes well, and after a couple of years the project applies for funding. Small at first, to prove it can manage the money properly, then bigger each year. This enables it to grow and develop – both artistically and in terms of engage-

ment. It is held up as a great example of the impact public funding of the arts can have.

It is now a large project, needing significant funding. Other funders have come on board, often including local authorities, but ACE remains the backbone. But others are calling for a share of the project funding pie, including projects led by communities who have historically had less investment, and who have a fair claim. The only progression route ACE has for organisations is to apply to their National Portfolio, to get regular funding over three or four years. Hastings Fat Tuesday was encouraged to do this – a process that takes a huge amount of time and effort (I know, I've done it several times) – but wasn't successful. So, like a game of snakes and ladders, they had to go back round for project funding, made even harder because the funding pie has got smaller. Eventually, despite being a fantastic event that ticks all the boxes, they lose their most important source of income and find themselves in an existential crisis.

HFT isn't the first major event in Hastings to lose Arts Council income in this way. Coastal Cur-

rents also lost their investment after years of project funding. ACE is in a difficult position, with less money from central government, local authorities pulling back, and more demand than ever. But as the country's main arts development body it should have established better support and pathways to help organisations transition away from project funding.

It's also the case that not every project or organisation has to continue indefinitely. The arts sector is very bad at acknowledging that something has run its course. But when a project like Fat Tuesday Festival is at risk, you have to ask why the system doesn't work better.

The Fat Tuesday team will make every effort to make something happen in February. There is a Crowdfunder, and artists and others will rally round in support... ironically, just like when the event first started. But they shouldn't have to. The arts funding game has become riskier and more uncertain in recent years, with the real losers being the artists and communities whose ideas and needs sparked the projects in the first place.

FAT TUESDAY CROWDFUNDER

Following the rejection by Arts Council England of their funding application for the 2024 festival reported in HIP 240, Hastings Fat Tuesday set up a crowdfunder. It's aimed at raising cash to save at least some elements of the event. Within a few days the in-

itial target of £10,000 was reached; the total sum pledged had risen to over £11,200 as at last Sunday evening, with over two weeks still to run.

Sally Lampitt, director of the community interest company which delivers the Fat Tuesday programme, says that they'll be waiting until the closure date of 27 December to work out what

they'll be able to achieve. They're also in conversation with other potential donors and funders. However, they are "really hoping" to deliver free events like the Unplugged Saturday on 10 February and the Tuesday Tour on the 13th.

■ See <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/hastings-fat-tuesday-music-festival-2024>

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HASTINGS TIDES

DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES				SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 15 DEC	H0:00am	L6:58am	H12:17pm	L7:16pm	7:53	3:51	
SAT 16 DEC	H0:48am	L7:39am	H1:009pm	L7:59pm	7:54	3:52	
SUN 17 DEC	H1:38am	L8:24am	H2:04pm	L8:46pm	7:54	3:52	
MON 18 DEC	H2:30am	L9:14am	H3:01pm	L9:39pm	7:55	3:52	
TUES 19 DEC	H3:22am	L10:11am	H4:00pm	L10:39pm	7:56	3:52	FIRST
WED 20 DEC	H4:20am	L11:15am	H5:03pm	L11:44pm	7:56	3:53	
THURS 21 DEC	H5:22am	L12:23pm	H6:10pm		7:57	3:53	
FRI 22 DEC	L0:51am	H6:28am	L1:29pm	H7:16pm	7:58	3:54	
SAT 23 DEC	L1:55am	H7:33am	L2:33pm	H8:17pm	7:58	3:54	
SUN 24 DEC	L2:45am	H8:33am	L3:33pm	H9:14pm	7:58	3:55	
MON 25 DEC	L3:54am	H9:28am	L4:28pm	H10:24pm	7:59	3:56	
TUES 26 DEC	L4:46am	H10:18am	L5:16pm	H10:46pm	7:59	3:56	
WED 27 DEC	L5:32am	H11:04am	L5:59pm	H11:30pm	7:59	3:57	FULL
THURS 28 DEC	L6:14am	H11:45am	L6:37pm		7:59	3:58	

* L = LOW TIDE H = HIGHTIDE For beach safety advice visit: mli.org/safety/beach-safety

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priority. Partnerships with other councils, which helps us reduce our back office costs, partnerships with government, such as Levelling Up, that leads to new investment in housing and health, and partnerships with our excellent local voluntary sector, who bring new ideas and energy to the provision of key services."

The call for partnership with government could hardly be understated, given the amounts of cash currently being splashed for capital projects through the Town Deal and other multi-million pound investment programmes sponsored by DLUHC (the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). But Cllr Barnett will have bitten his tongue to avoid criticising the Chancellor of Exchequer's Autumn Statement issued on 22 November, which offered no direct help to local authorities in budget crisis.

NOT ALONE

It's by no means only Labour-run councils or those operating in financially deprived areas which are finding themselves on the brink of bankruptcy. A survey released by the Local Government Association last week warned that almost one in five council leaders and chief executives believe it to be "fairly or very likely" that they will issue a section 114 report (formal declaration of insolvency) within the next 15 months. A letter issued last week to DLUHC Secretary Michael Gove and the Chancellor Jeremy Hunt by the leaders of England's

largest county and unitary authorities – including Conservative leader of East Sussex County Council, Cllr Keith Glazier – advised that the majority of higher tier councils "will now have no choice but to increase their planned level of service reductions, reduce investment on growth-creating capital projects, and levy higher council tax rises: all of which impact our residents. For some, even this drastic action will not be enough, with seven in ten now no longer confident they can balance their budget next year."

The UK inflation rate was running at over 11% in October last year and was still 4.6% a year later. Last month local government trade unions negotiated a 9.42% pay rise for lowest-paid workers backdated to 1 April. Councils cannot avoid incurring soaring energy costs. They are facing a tsunami of demand for housing the homeless – Hastings is only one of many councils exposed in this respect. Yet central government has kept rises of council tax capped at 2.99% for both the current year and next year, while consistently cutting direct financial assistance to local authorities. How does the Chancellor imagine that they can keep providing services at previous levels? Presumably he doesn't.

This report was necessarily prepared before the council meeting on Wednesday. But, since the proposals put forward by Cllr Barnett are backed by the council's Chief Executive Jane Hartnell and its finance officers, and have been backed unanimously in cabinet, it seems inevitable that they will have been voted through.

WHY WON'T THE COUNCIL RAISE COUNCIL TAX?

One theoretical avenue open to councils is to hold a local referendum to approve the setting of council tax above the 2.99% cap – a straightforward way, one might think, for a town's population to secure the provision of desired public services by opting for increased local (rather than national) tax rates. However, the council would itself have to pay for the cost of holding the referendum, and there's no precedent for a successful outcome.

The option has been open to all recipients of council tax since enactment of the 2011 Localism Act. Only the Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner has tried it, seeking a rise in 2015 of 15.8% for its share of the tax intake. It lost: 30% voted

in favour, 70% against. Voters perhaps thought that, if the need was real enough, central government would step in.

Jane Hartnell, Chief Executive of Hastings Borough Council, has considered the option, but told the cabinet in her report last week that the cost in Hastings would be around £100,000. "Whilst there will very soon become a point where we cannot cut any further and still meet core statutory responsibilities, or earn any more income, the council has been advised that any government support will be predicated on demonstrating that we have taken all possible steps to reduce non-essential spending."

In other words, central government would withhold funding from any borough whose local electorate dared to make its own contribution to raising itself from public penury.



Dave Young

West Hill Café and St Mary in the Castle – 'Partners' Sought

A call by Hastings Borough Council (HBC) for "experienced developers and operators" to put forward ideas and proposals "to restore the West Hill Café to its full potential" as part of the Hastings Town Deal Castle project has attracted a large response.

The prospectus invited "a partner who will work with the council"

to develop, build, operate and maintain a new building that will serve as café, restaurant and interpretation centre for the adjacent castle ruins.

HBC set 8 December as the closing date for submission of expressions of interest. On 22 November Health and Culture portfolio holder Andy Batsford told a meeting

of the full council that 25 bids from national and local businesses had already been received, including plans to transform the landmark and link it with St Mary in the Castle.

Cllr Batsford said that the council would review the plans in the new year: "There will hopefully be a very dynamic and exciting beauty pageant to develop one of the key sites in Hastings."

As to potential re-use of the existing building as a café (or for any other function) in the meantime, the council blog makes it clear that no enquiries are currently being sought. An HBC spokesperson said last week: "The council is currently undertaking investigations and reports to determine the condition of the building before any short-term options could be explored."

With regard to St Mary in the Castle, the former church-turned-arts-venue at the bottom of the cliff below which has now been closed for more than a year, the spokesperson said: "We are continuing conversations about [its] future. We are keen to see it being brought back into use, but also need to ensure that we are working with the right groups or organisations for the future of such an iconic venue. We are working to minimise the cost of the closure"

The council has declined to give any figure for the monthly maintenance costs being incurred.

Year of Shutdown for Owens 'Refurbishment'

The company which owns the OWENS Entertainment Centre in the former Debenhams store in Robertson Street has announced it will "start full development" of the premises in the new year.

The Centre opened in November 2022 offering a mix of immersive 'adventure experiences', standard games such as crazy golf and indoor bowling, and a number of hospitality areas. It was suddenly shut down without notice to concession holders or to customers with pre-bookings in early September this year. No reasons were publicly provided at the time, though it was clear that the business was running at a low capacity, and generally assumed that serious financial losses were being incurred.

Now owners CFEC Limited, who

have rebranded the company name from C&O Entertainments Limited though it remains the same legal entity, have issued a statement that they have completed "extensive building surveys and refurbishment planning", and concluded that a full redevelopment of the 77,000 square foot site will be necessary "to ensure a full customer experience upon reopening".

The plans for the upgraded centre are said to include hi-tech 'virtual reality' and immersive gaming, a bowling zone, improved golf facilities, a new soft play arena, and a 160-seater sea-view restaurant and lounge. The full redevelopment is estimated to take up to a year to complete, and will require an additional multi-million pound investment by CFEC.

Despite the extended length of

the closure, customers with outstanding bookings from September are not being reimbursed. Instead, they've been invited to accept an equivalent "gift voucher" to be spent "when the centre reopens".

As to former concession holders, a spokesperson for CFEC said that they are in contact with all of them "to coordinate the current closure of the centre. We remain committed to Hastings and its community, including suppliers and concession holders, and are working hard to progress planning around the redevelopment of the centre to honour this commitment."

It seems doubtful, however, whether any local contractors will be willing to take on the redevelopment – at least not without very substantial upfront payments. Chris Dodwell, whose company Hastings Building Services Limited undertook the main contract work for the company's initial development work, says he is still owed £157,000 in unpaid invoices from 2022.



NEWS

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Sara Lou Bowrey courtesy of 18 Hours

Benjamin Calling

CAF FEAN

A phone call with Benjamin Zephaniah was a performance in and of itself.

Hello? Is that Caf? This is Benjamin Zephaniah.

I had been so nervous. So excited... I felt I hadn't read enough of his work. I had my questions ready, written, scrubbed out, rewritten in pencil in front of me and within seconds, I was transported.

Charisma and clout – handed down the phone in dulcet Brummie tones.

Visions of his compost bin, the ants and worms, working away... his running routine, his veganism, his activism; the kind, kind way he described stop and search to me – in ways that made me feel not stupid, but gently informed... what life was like for a young Black man in London in the 80s.

We must have spoken for an hour? Half an hour? Time wasn't really in the room.

Language was – and a love for Hastings and its people, and a fizz and a vigour and a message of peace. Always peace.

Scrawling down his easy-cho-

sen, clear, true words, my heart was in my mouth. How do I report back what he has said? What's the best way? So, I just transcribed really. In a way the hardest and the easiest article I've written. How to write anything... when the person you're writing about is a king of writing.

And this, from someone who at 13 years of age couldn't read and write. Wasn't interested in literature. Became a proponent and master of it – and much, much more.

When I met Benjamin by telephone, my world shifted a little bit. Everyone I've spoken to says the same of him – from friends who worked with him for years, to those who haven't known his work but were held by his presence in the world. He was kind, he was Rastafari, he was generous, he was inspiring and inspired. He would call just to say hello. He was adept at putting people at their ease...

Losing him is bitter.

He died, eight weeks after succumbing to a brain tumour. A rapid exit. Dramatic. Perhaps in keeping with his flow, his energy. Which, despite his passing, absolutely resonates and abounds.

To honour him, this man I met once, but whose majesty, presence, sense of the world and his place in it, its place in him... I wanted to write. I needed help – so I reached out to folk in our Hastings community, and the outpouring of affection, stories, love has helped this shock mourning.

Below are some of the beautiful things people have said, shared and sent me – my deepest thanks. With love to all those grieving the passing of Benjamin Zephaniah.

A bright, bright being whose call will echo long.

Mandy Curtis: *"As Lemn Sissay said, 'Everything a poet can do Benjamin did first'. He reflected Rastafarianism where it is rarely seen. When he came to Global Fusion we held a Q&A and somehow my son Solomon (then aged 7 with dreadlocks) crept onto the sofa and sat next to him. Benjamin let him stay there for the entire interview. I recognise that, as a Rasta, he cared about children and future, and it now seems obvious that Benjamin should include Solomon."*

Lorna Hamilton-Brown: *"Benjamin's poetry made a massive impact on my life. I introduced him to my son who got into writing poems. He was such important Black male role model breaking stereotype."*

Deanne Naula: *"From our shared Brummie roots to pride whenever I saw this loud, intelligent, creative, principled Black man making his own space in a world not made for him and the respect for him. It always gave me hope and strength that there were more possibilities than I was told."*

Kate Makes: *"As much as his poetry and performances will be remembered, let's also thank him for all of his outreach with young people and children that had such an impact on us."*

Brian Rybolt: *"What a great, talented person, he always made me laugh and think."*

limore and Green outsider Becca Horn as declared contestants.

Analysis published in the *Telegraph* newspaper last week suggested that there has been a surge of support at national level for Reform UK over the past year – up from around 5% to 10% – as traditional Tory voters castigate their government for failure to control immigration numbers. It looks like bad news for Mrs Hart locally.

Fernando to stand for Parliament

Lucian Fernando, borough councillor for Silverhill, who left the Conservative party earlier this year and joined Reform UK, has announced that he has been selected as official parliamentary can-

didate for his new party in the constituency of Hastings & Rye. With the next general election at most barely a year away, he joins incumbent Tory MP Sally-Ann Hart, Labour hopeful Helena Dol-

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

✉ Letter

SHINGLES PROTECTION

Dear HIP

I would like to clarify the connection between chickenpox and shingles (*Chickenpox Parties* in HIP 240). Shingles occurs in people who have previously been exposed to varicella, which causes chickenpox. If you have chickenpox, the varicella virus can stay in the body in an inactive state: if it is reactivated in adulthood, often through the immune system being weakened, it causes shingles.

It is therefore not the case that immunity to varicella (from catching chickenpox) protects against shingles, as claimed in the fourth paragraph of your article.

Paul Beaney-Gainford

📧 From our website

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

All Rise (in HIP 239) was a really interesting article, thank you. Good to see that decisions are being made with climate change in mind, although the caveat is always 'if we can afford' the mitigation and, looking at the current council's financial situation, sadly the answer is 'not really'.

I firmly believe that nature-based solutions are vital at this point. Further defences will inevitably become insufficient, whereas flood plains and so on dissipate wave energy and create habitats.

Jane Ripley

We would love to hear from you.

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Please be aware we may need to edit letters for reasons of space and we will only withhold names if this is necessary for the protection of the writer.

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Under Section 34 of the Licensing Act 2003

This notice is to advise that on the **7th day of December 2023** an application for a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as: **St Andrews Mews (Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28) 1 Waldegrave Street, Hastings, TN34 1SP** Was made by: **Lexicom Ltd t/a St. Andrews Mews**

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Any person wishing to make

representations about this application should write to Hastings Borough Council, Head of Environment & Place, Muriel Matters House, Breeds Place, Hastings, TN34 3UY, or email Licensing@hastings.gov.uk within twenty eight consecutive days from the date of the application shown above.

The application can be viewed by pre-arranged appointment at our offices, during office hours. It is an offence knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with an application & a person is liable to a fine of up to a maximum of £5,000 on summary conviction for the offence.

Dated this 7th day of December 2023

**CLEAN WATER ACTION GROUP**

Demonstrating the support for clean water activism in Hastings, Rebecca Sinker of CWAG reports that they are delighted to have exceeded their crowdfunding target of £5,500 by more than £1,000. This enabled them to begin their twice-weekly water testing at Pelham Beach and West Marina Beach on 23 November. Results take a few days to come through from the lab and any concerning results are shared on Instagram @cleanwateractgp. "A huge thanks to all who contributed!" Additional money will go towards rapid response tests in the event of floods or pollution incidents, as well as to public information events.

Meanwhile the CWAG team met with the SOS Whitstable testing team last week. The plan is to be part of a network of citizen scientist campaigners along the South/Southeastern coast, to share methodology, data and practice.

■ *CWAG are looking for volunteers to help with their work (especially social media/comms). If you'd like to be involved, get in touch by email: hslcleanwateraction@gmail.com.*

SOME TOWN FLOODING CLARIFICATIONS

In Clean Water Watch 4, Issue 139, we mentioned how poor communication was hampering understanding of our water woes. A recent freedom of information request (FIR) has at last clarified some issues relating to the recent town flooding. Things clarified were:

1. That the storm relief tunnel does not take any runoff from the Alexandra Park stream and was never designed to do this. Its purpose is to take combined sewer flows from houses and roads in the surrounding area only.
2. That the manhole cover installed in South Terrace in 2019 as a cleaning point was

A regular column to update readers on the damaging effects of the current management of water in Hastings, surrounding areas (and nationally) and what people are doing about it. If you have any information, please contact community@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk marked *Clean Water Watch*.



not an asset owned by Southern Water because it is not a sewer but a river culvert. The cover was sealed up several days after the recent flood. The culvert is not connected to the storm tunnel as it is river water, but is designed to go out to sea through the Denmark Pace outfall.

3. That there is doubt as to whether a risk assessment for installing the manhole was ever undertaken. Asked to provide one, the answer was simply: "... we do not hold the information you have requested."

All this raises serious questions. Why did Southern Water think the river culvert was their asset and who takes responsibility for it now? Why was a risk assessment not carried out at the time? Why was nothing done after the January flooding?

■ *For more information on the FIR follow this link: tinyurl.com/2p95dscs*

NEIGHBOURING NEWS

Meanwhile, The Lewes and Eastbourne Council websites reported on a motion passed on 15 November by Eastbourne Borough Council demanding that Southern Water starts the work needed to improve water quality. Cllr Jim Murray criticised Southern Water for a "tsunami of human waste", saying: "This volume of waste and the frequency of discharges show that the discharges have become routine, rather than an emergency response to exceptional conditions."

The recent Panorama programme *The Water Pollution Cover-Up* shows how a combination of cover-up and weak oversight from the Environment Agency allows this to happen. Although the programme was depressing to watch, such programmes at least help uncover what we know is happening but are unable to prove and can help inch things forward.

The response from the Environment Agency was, of course, depressingly predictable, beginning with those familiar words: "We take our responsibility to protect the environment very seriously."

Peace 'n Love and Warmth on the Pier

FIONA MCGARRY

Monday morning: it's dark, wet and stormy – I can hear the sea roaring in the distance. I have some work with a midday deadline, but my elderly mother has been up half the night as her dog had 'a bad stomach', and I promise to help her with her shopping (removing 'dog biscuits' and 'chews' from her list – surely the culprit). My partner's hair is standing on end, and he is rubbing his chest – a sure sign that he's stressed and anxious because of everything he's agreed to sort out this morning. I ask myself: was it a good idea to book a sauna on the pier for 1pm today? What possessed me?

Monday lunchtime: I'm shivering on the pier in my swimming gear gazing at a large green horsebox with a smoked glass door. It contains wooden benches and a blazing woodstove, sauna stones and a water bucket and ladle. This is Samphire Sauna, brainchild of Zoya Jordan and her friend and business partner Nell Monck. Although we booked tickets for a communal sauna, my friend and I have it all to ourselves today, and as soon as we sit down inside, I start to feel properly warm for the first time in weeks.

It's not uncomfortably hot; I gradually break into a sweat and then flit outside for a tentative 'sprinkler' shower. After a while I become less timid: alternating the heat of the top bench with the bucket-of-cold-water-over-the-head shower. We end up sitting outside on the deckchairs in our sauna hats and bathing gear and eating slices of orange – quite surreal in December, but which we agree makes us both feel rather empowered.

The hour passes astonishingly quickly. It's a small space – and would be 'cosy' with five people – and yet there is a sense of spaciousness as you look out at the sea in front of you. It's also remarkably calm and soothing: the only sounds are the waves crashing against the pier and receding. The sort of thing you might listen to as a recording to help you zone out, but this is the real deal.



Mark Lamb

We are unobtrusively but very well looked after by Zoya. She and Nell originally got the idea for Samphire Sauna after encountering a similar idea in the West Country several years ago. They initially set up at 'The Hub' near Bodiam and then did some successful pop-ups on the beach in Eastbourne and Bexhill, just as outdoor saunas started to become a 'thing'.

She's very pleased with the new location of the sauna on the pier and, as a Hastings resident, she hopes this will be permanent: "I didn't expect to have such a close connection with the sea here," she says, "although you're in the middle of the town, you aren't really aware of that. You go into a little 'sauna bubble'. During the winter we've obviously had some high tides and a lot of wind and rain, and when you're in there seeing big waves crashing below you, it's super life-affirming: watching nature and feeling connected."

She also tells us how good it is to see people connecting and laughing with each other – even forming new friendships as the sauna starts activating their endorphins: "People come, and they'll be tired or stressed, but soon they're opening up and chatting away. It puts you into a different state of mind."

It's true, I feel set up for the day afterwards: re-energised, ravenous, and as relaxed as if I'd been on a meditation retreat. We're already planning our next visit. It would be interesting to come on a sunny day when the sea is calm, or when there are other people – different from the wild, elemental experience we had this time, but not better.

■ *Find out more at samphiresauna.co.uk*



COMMUNITY

HASTINGS INDEPENDENT IS YOUR PAPER – USE YOUR VOICE... HASTINGSINDEPENDENTPRESS



Photos: Nigel Woodford

It's a Kind of Madness?

HELEN MURPHY & NICK PELLING
investigate an amazing project.

Something extraordinary is happening at the junction of Pevensey and London Roads. Something almost heroic, perhaps. Four years ago, one man bought the collapsing

Victorian church, without being quite sure why. For almost four years he has been hammering and drilling and bashing away in a world of dust: entombed under Pevensey Road, lost to normal life. We went to see him, tiptoeing around the power tools, to try to

make sense of this exceptional mission.

In conversation, Chris Ostwald seems perfectly sane. He explains, he went to a property auction in London and just couldn't resist bidding. He came away the proud owner of St Leonards Congregational Church, a building – at the time of purchase – that was more of a home to dry-rot, woodworm and drug addicts than to the al-

mighty. Chris reflects with a smile how a local, watching him sweat to install antique Welsh railway railings, told him he was “as mad as a hatter”.

Chris took us on a tour around the church. The thing that strikes you is just how much work he has done and is doing. And will be doing.

RESTORING NOT RIPPING OUT

A casual observer of the goings-on might think this is the activity of a developer on the make, perhaps hoping to jam some ugly flats into the Victorian shell. But the admirable thing about Chris's approach is that he wants to keep the purity of the old church but carefully and subtly repurpose it for the benefit of the Community. In fact, at present, he hopes to create a space in the under-church for a market, a café and even a small cinema. Upstairs in the church itself, he hopes to save the authentic surroundings as a beautiful but secular venue for weddings, and a space for all manner of community meetings.

Surprisingly, when he started, Chris did not really have a plan: he fell in love with the building and its possibilities and he is still working those out. What is clear is that he is not really in this for profit – and he has yet to find a source of external funding, despite contacting people like Historic England. He says he just finds “the journey” exciting and wants to create something that the town will enjoy and use.

His personal story is intriguing.

ing. He went straight from school into Pinewood Studios and eventually became a skilled maker and crafter in the world of special effects. He is quite proud to say that he worked with Jim Henson and the Muppets team and on the blockbuster *Flash Gordon*. He was also actually the man responsible for making the monstrous plant in the film version of *Little Shop of Horrors*. But the advent of CGI left him a bit disillusioned: “You might as well put a tennis ball on a stick and let the computer nerds do the rest.” He diversified into antiques and running London-based cafes, but his incredible constructive skills stayed with him – alongside a striking willingness to teach himself new skills from YouTube!

A MERRY BAND

It should be clarified that Chris has not been entirely alone in his efforts. He has been ably supported by a handful of fellow travellers. When we visited, the charismatic local filmmaker, Jamie De Ath, was engaged in cheerily running a festive market selling Christmas trees and gifts. Upstairs we came across Nigel Woodford, a skilled stone mason who is doing an incredibly impressive job in lovingly and authentically preserving the exquisite Victorian stained glass windows. Between them all, Chris, Jamie and Nigel, they seemed a merry band of believers, quietly doing something absolutely amazing. This is a story with much still to be told; watch this space.

A Time Machine in George Street

HELEN MURPHY & NICK PELLING
visit an almost new vintage outlet

What does the concept of vintage clothing actually mean? Some might think it is just second-hand stuff, coming round again; aimed at people who find nostalgic costumery a cosy escape from grim modernity and maybe – for some of our readers – it might be thought frippery in tough times. But, arguably, carefully selecting from the past's wardrobe is an art form. One such style curator is undoubt-



Donna Grimaldi

edly Donna Grimaldi: the new queen of classic vintage in Old Town.

Earlier this year Donna set up her vintage clothing shop, *Bobby and Dandy*, in George Street, moving here after a decade or so in Brighton. It has to be admitted that there are a lot of vintage types around in Hastings (we don't mean old peo-

ple) but Donna's approach is distinctive and discerning. As she says, “all the clothes are hand-picked from around the world.” Her shop is certainly an interesting mix: a veritable treasure trove in what feels like a fashion cave. If you are into Americana stylings, French peasant workwear (not for wearing to actual work, of course) or just exploring the fashion landscapes from the 1940s through to the 1980s, it is definitely worth a visit.

DAYS AND NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS

Donna told us she had always had “a feeling” for retro stuff. She developed a real love for the 80s look and sound – partly due to an older brother – even though she is far too young to have experienced it firsthand. But, it seems that she was not always set on a course into the sartorial past. In fact, her career track has been most unusual. She studied psychology in her twenties and for a while, worked as a sup-

port worker in mental health. But, even then, she was always collecting vintage at home and selling it privately. The pull of the fashion world eventually led to a course of study. But her steps after that were not always predictable. Extraordinarily, at one point, she found herself joining the circus!

This was the real thing: she lived in a traditional small circus caravan, worked on the costumes, and travelled from town to town in the old school manner. Donna even performed as part of the circus finale as a cabaret-style sailor gal. It was in some ways a tough life with none of life's comforts – not so much as an oven or a fridge. And yet, as she says, “I didn't mind it at all.” (Aptly, Donna is also a major fan of Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*.)

A NEW PLANET

Donna is clearly a resilient, beguiling and flexible operator; she was even briefly in an electro-synth

band. But her passion for fashion has always been her main mooring. Her vintage offerings have, in recent years, attracted much attention. *Bobby and Dandy* has been covered by quite a swishy range of magazines: Forbes, Conde Nast, the Sunday Telegraph and many more. She has provided costumes for several television shows, such as *Sex Education* and *Bridgerton*. All of that can seem like a world away, but her commitment to Hastings Old Town is quite palpable. She argues that Hastings is now “more interesting and eccentric than Brighton.” When we asked if she was worried about all the competition between the vintage shops of Hastings, she commented that “there are many different ways to do vintage” and that the variety of outlets “simply helps to make this town a destination”. Evidently, fashionistas everywhere like to time-travel and now, in Old Town, they have a new planet to visit.



Eat Write Love

NICKY AND SONJA of Creative Concoctions - a local social enterprise, boosting creative health.

This recipe is going to stop the haters – the sprout haters! A bold claim but we stand by our Christmassy sprout gratin recipe to turn hearts and heads!

It's time to grab your sprouts and your journal and pen. Let's turn this poor little veg, often left on the shelf, into the party starter ...

JOURNALING #1: Write the word sprout down your page like this:

S
P
R
O
U
T

Now write the first word or phrase that comes into your mind when you think of sprouts, starting with the initial letter, eg S – stinky

FUN FACTS:

- As well as lemons and limes, Captain Cook gave his sailors sprouts to prevent scurvy – because they have so much vitamin C.
- The UK eats more sprouts than anywhere else in Europe - with our sprout fields being the equivalent of more than 3000 football pitches.
- Cutting a cross in the bottom of a sprout is nothing to do with cooking your sprout, but rather an old superstition that it would drive the away evil spirits which lived in the vegetables!
- In 2008, Linus Urbanec achieved the stomach-churning record of consuming 31 sprouts in 60 seconds!
- Abnormal temperatures in the UK in 2017 led to sprout plants growing taller than usual and producing so-called 'monster sprouts'.

NUTRITION INFO:

One serving contains:

- Four times the amount of vitamin C of an orange – great for supporting the immune system to fight those winter colds and flu.
- Vitamin K – which supports heart health and blood clotting.
- A range of B vitamins which support energy production, healthy skin and hair, brain health and anxiety management.



Sonja Colman

CHRISTMASSY SPROUT GRATIN

Serves 6 as a side dish, or 4 as a main

Ingredients:

- 400g sprouts, peeled and halved
- 250g chestnuts
- 1 carrot, peeled and cut into batons
- 1 onion, sliced
- 3-4 sprigs fresh thyme (or 1 tsp dried)
- 2 dried bay leaves
- 6 tbsp breadcrumbs
- 30g butter
- 3 tbsp plain flour
- 200ml milk
- 1 tsp English mustard (optional)
- 100g cheddar cheese, grated
- 20g dried cranberries, chopped

Method:

- Prepare the chestnuts: you can use ready-cooked chestnuts, but fresh ones are usually cheaper and are not difficult to prepare. If using ready cooked ones, just slice them. If using fresh ones:

score the rounded side of each chestnut and place on a baking tray. Cook in the oven at 180°C for 30 minutes.

- Take out of the oven and cover the tray with another baking tray, or a plate – this will enable the chestnuts to steam and make peeling them much easier. When cooled, peel and slice.
- Meanwhile, prepare the onion, carrot and sprouts and steam for about 8 minutes – you want the sprouts to be still green and have a little crunch.
- Add the chestnuts to the vegetables when ready and put them all into a baking dish.
- Make a simple cheese sauce: Melt the butter in a saucepan and then add the flour slowly, mixing thoroughly the whole time, until the mixture forms a thick paste. Gradually, add the milk, and as before, keep stirring to avoid lumps.
- Once the milk is all mixed in, you should have a creamy white sauce. Add about ¾ of the cheese to

the sauce and mix in well.

- Season, and if you want, you can also add a tsp of English mustard. Mix in well and pour your cheese sauce over the vegetables and chestnuts.
- Add the thyme and bay leaves into the dish and mix through.
- Add the remaining cheese to your breadcrumbs and cranberries and sprinkle them over the top of the dish.
- Bake in the oven for around 25 minutes until the top is golden brown and crunchy.
- Serve alongside your Christmas dinner. (Don't forget to remove the bay leaves when serving.)

SERVING SUGGESTIONS

- As a side dish or great on its own.
- Serve with potatoes and vegetables of your choice for a main meal, or just on its own for a lighter supper.

SUBSTITUTES

- No sprouts? Use parsnips and other root veg.
- No chestnuts? Use walnuts or hazelnuts.
- Don't like cheese sauce? Use white sauce.

STORAGE

You can make the vegetable mix and gratin topping separately in advance, put them together for cooking on the day if you want to get ahead of the game. If you have leftovers, just store in the fridge and warm through when you want to eat it. It should be fine for about 3 days.

JOURNALING #2: 'Tis the Season to be... [5 mins]

Bring to mind a happy Christmas meal from the past or one that you would love to have now. Write from a place of gratitude and joy: think of the faces around that table; recall the dishes (maybe sprouts) as they were passed around; think of the little rituals that went into that meal or the sayings people would always say.

REFLECT [1 min]

What moment of happiness from that memory could you bring into this year's holiday season?

JOURNALING #3: Action!

What favourite Christmas snacks or Boxing Day leftovers could you introduce a sprout twist to? Go wild – write a list of seven without stopping!





FEATURES

HASTINGS INDEPENDENT IS YOUR PAPER – USE YOUR VOICE... HASTINGSINDEPENDENTPRESS

Israel Velasco

Should Hastings follow the Basque Country's lead?

ROD WEBB writes about the recent inspirational talk on social change by Gorka Espiau who was invited by Hastings Borough Council Cabinet.

The regeneration of the Basque Country in Spain after fifty years of conflict is an uplifting story. Gorka Espiau was an active member of the Basque Peace Movement but for the last ten years has been involved in untangling the ingredients that enable change to happen.

It's also uplifting living in a town where social connections are so readily available. In this case, Cllr Simon Willis happens to be a friend of Gorka from his time as CEO of the Young Foundation where Gorka worked on transformation projects in the UK. And Hastings being a town of strange connections, Gorka has already been here before – when his father was learning English, and he was learning to walk.

At the heart of Gorka's talk is the way change can lead to more equality, as was the case in the regeneration of the Basque Country, rather than less (as we have become so used to). Almost immediately the word 'collaboration' came up, something this town strives so hard to achieve, not always successfully.

Gorka pointed out something we all know but rarely manage to apply: "Transformation is never about one person" which is why it's important to represent successful transformation as a "collective action". The West has become too attached to individual action and that needs a strong counter-narrative.

Gorka is well aware that Hastings is in a moment of transformation and understood that his talk was particularly pertinent to this town, where some people feel a sense of disconnect with the change that is coming.

THE BASQUE TRANSFORMATION

The first half of the talk was about what happened in the Basque Country, also known as the Basque Autonomous Community, and how standard analysis of 'structural changes' within society often miss the dynamics of social change.

Something that is normally considered a negative driver – the flight of capital from Bilbao to Madrid – led to a far more fundamental change such as worker cooperatives taking over businesses. One example he mentioned was the transformation of an arms factory into one of the most successful bicycle factories in the world.

Over time, this kind of economic change enabled local government to raise substantial amounts of money through taxation. They could do this because central government, seeing little future for the region, had offered to devolve

After living in this town for ten years I thought I was used to all the work going on behind the scenes to create and maintain a thriving community. But I was still surprised by the scene that greeted me when I walked into the Concordia Hall to join the *Big Celebration* two weeks ago.

The hall was not only packed with people but was also generating an intangible sense of energy and purpose that gave the gathering a genuine festive feel. There were well over 150 people there with others still arriving. There was music, there was drumming, there were stalls displaying artwork and poetry written by participating children. At the front of the hall, children were being entertained by the founder and chairman Aaron Hosannah with interactive drumming and storytelling. At one point, a dragon danced down the aisle and out the door.

Aaron explains: "As a man of Guyanese descent, gatherings are opportunities to bring people together to celebrate as one and to eat, dance, and communicate with one another and to connect with our neighbours. It's also a great opportunity to showcase the richness, creativity, and vibrancy of our community through showcasing our talents and skills, and to encourage everyone to bring and do their best."

The *Big Celebration* is an annual event, now in its third year, where the organisers of the Progress Network pay tribute to the local community members who make a positive impact throughout

St Leonards and the wider area. This includes a series of award ceremonies for children and young people and recognition for outstanding community contributions.

Not long after I arrived, Aaron gave an inspirational talk about the struggles he faced in setting up the Progress Network. It's taken seven years and some false starts to get the project to where it is today, since only really gaining traction in 2020. But, after watching the video presentation that night, Progress Network's story validates what Aaron went on to say: "Don't give up on something good."

Progress Network works with the local community in "establishing primary needs, setting aims, designing solutions, and facilitating activities." They also help local community members to acquire skills that can be used in leading workshops and other roles in the organisation with a focus on finding solutions to everyday problems in the community.

"Our aim is to provide an environment with activities that reverse the lack of opportunity by supporting talent and skill development via youth-led social engagement programmes," he says.

Two of their main weekly clubs are the Great Work Creativity Club supporting STEAM and life-skill development through creativity and St Leonards Sparks Football Club, which supports mental and physical well-being.

The celebration was also an opportunity for Progress Network to review what has been



Directors of Progress Network, Jeron...

Celebrating

achieved throughout the year with the support of the organisation's many volunteers, such as the Reimagining & Repurposing of Misused Spaces project. This is where I learned about all the things that have been going on – sometimes only a few metres away as I walked around St Leonards – referring particularly to the site in St Leonards just behind the row of shops on Kings Road.

"Up until now this has been an eyesore, left derelict and abused," Aaron explains, but has been transformed into a "safe vibrant

After attending a talk on bottom-up regeneration, regular contributor and former Community Editor, ROD WEBB, visits a grassroots community project.



the power to raise taxes, which was accepted. Breaking the safety net of central government funding in a serious slump was a risky decision. But a willingness to take risks is part of the story that Gorka had to tell. This risk certainly paid off once the economy had revived.

The famous Guggenheim Museum played a role, but not because it was imposed on the general population as so often happens with high status projects like that, rather because they bought into the idea. In effect they were saying, 'We need an artefact to show the transformation that is already taking place. We are Basque and have a plan'. And bear in mind that the proposed museum had already been touted round the capitals of Europe and rejected by them.

At the start of the transformation, only 15% of the population spoke the Basque language. Twen-

ty or so years later, it is about 37%, with the majority of the Basque students being taught in the Basque language. Not only that, but according to a BBC report from 2016, "Almost 48% of the working-age population has a degree-level qualification, similar to the levels in Finland and Norway," as well as, "An unusually high proportion of these graduates, almost half, have studied science, maths and engineering." All this required investment: "If the Basque region were ranked as a country, only Denmark and Austria would have higher levels of per-pupil spending in Europe." So how was such enormous change brought about when there was no money?

THE DRIVERS OF CHANGE

According to Gorka, it was all down to a collective narrative. They had a social story that ended up becoming reality: "Basque people

throughout history have always survived and nobody has helped us". So the values are collective action rather than individual action. With the schools, for example, people were prepared to mortgage their houses to rebuild a Basque language education, Gorka explained. So the values also included sacrifice for the common good.

As already mentioned, one of the key factors that emerged from the study was how the transformation had led to more equality rather than, as so often is the case, to more inequality. Gorka points out that, when studying transformations that have occurred in other parts of the world, the correlation between the drivers of change become clear. Change dominated by individual action would lead to more inequality, change led by collective action led to more equality – as was the case in the Basque Country.

As all narratives, the Basque



Jose Maria Ligerio Loarte Creative Commons

Gorka collects his thoughts

'story' was not always entirely accurate. Gorka gave the example of a gastronomic movement that was based on the idea that 'good food was in the Basque genes.' Apparently not so. The movement was generated by borrowing from the French over the border and doing it better – and 'doing it better' came about by restaurants working together to create the change. The Basque Country quickly became renowned for their good food. In 2020, Recette Magazine wrote: "...it is said that the Basque Country boasts the highest concentration of Michelin-starred restaurants, per-capita, of any other region in the world."

WHAT ABOUT HASTINGS?

The general perception is that the town is changing and although much of the change is welcome, there is a constant worry that what is perceived as gentrification will benefit those new to the town at the expense of the less well off as has happened throughout the country.

But as Gorka explains, buying into the process of change is often the most difficult step to achieve and is a *good* starting point, leaving simply the concerns over consequences to be tackled. He sees the problem as the 'appearance of change' while things basically remain the same underneath, especially with deepening inequality. His message is that "change is possible without inequality".

Taking housing as an urgent problem that needs to be tackled

in the town, it was clear that he was advocating a very different solution than the piecemeal way things are currently carried out: creating a portfolio of experimentation. This would involve "generating a safe space for experimentation" where it is possible to test different things at the same time.

The portfolio would contain low-risk solutions, safe options that are known to work (to some extent at least); pilot projects that have worked elsewhere but contain some risk in a new location; and pure prototypes, new ideas that have never been tested.

All this involves the capacity of the town to visualise its own ecosystem, including who is doing what, and the ability to listen in a profound way, as opposed to the 'tick box' listening which provides the transactional information discussed above. Rather it requires collective sense making, a collective interpretation of all the information available.

All this would clearly be a challenge for a cash-strapped, risk averse local council. But with the invitation coming from the Hastings Borough Council Cabinet, it could be a step in the right direction.

■ For a talk on Conflict Resolution by Gorka visit thailandsocialinnovationplatform.org/gorka-es-piau-basque. For more information on the Young Foundation visit youngfoundation.org/about. For related information on community participation visit participatorycity.org



Samuel George

Jerome Odibi, Anthony Odegbami, and Aaron Hosannah

ng Progress

community space through an inclusive community-led beautification project," which has allowed participants to take ownership.

Aaron describes how the transformed space has been used for creative workshops including arts, mental health & well-being, drama, entrepreneurship for children and young people, skincare, drumming, as well as social events and meetings with local community members, businesses, and residents.

The accompanying film for the year review demonstrated clear-

ly the enthusiasm generated by the events which also include:

- Super Family Funday to support and promote health and fitness within the larger community.
- Young Stars Entrepreneur Fair to young people and children to recognise skills and abilities and gain skills in entrepreneurship.
- Progress Camping to go beyond the daily grind and take away a group of local people to enjoy nature, de-stress, and relax.

- Movie Nights in the Park, bringing the cinema to the people in natural spaces to congregate and enjoy.

Progress Network is a truly multicultural community organisation welcoming young people and children predominantly in the St Leonards area, but also in parts of Hastings, Ore, Hollington and as far as Eastbourne. They currently work with over 150 families locally and bring people together from all walks of life and ethnicities.

As the Progress Network's website declares: "Saint Leonards is in one of the most deprived council wards in East Sussex with inequalities caused by various socio-economic factors, lifestyle, and poor access to services." And they are determined to do something about it, believing that all individuals regardless of age, ethnicity or humble beginnings should have the opportunity to become "the best version of themselves."

Other commitments forced me to leave the *Big Celebration* before the food arrived, provided by Jerry Odibi of Mama Putts who is also secretary of the Progress Network. But I couldn't resist the mouthwatering smell as I passed the kitchen and took a peek. As with all great community events, sharing food is at the heart of it.

■ Find out more about The Progressive Network, the people behind it and what they do, by visiting progressnet.org or their Facebook page @progressnet-workic.



ARTS

HASTINGS INDEPENDENT IS YOUR PAPER – USE YOUR VOICE...  HASTINGSINDEPENDENTPRESS

James Champion Photography



Erik, Olav, and Max Show the Way Forward

VICTORIA KINGHAM meditates on the Lodestar Trio at Christ Church St Leonards

The Lodestar – guiding light, inspiration, Pole Star. The word is from Middle English. Middle English was strongly related to Old Norse. Old Norse was spoken by Vikings. Vikings inhabited Scandinavia and indeed England, until William The Conqueror, that is. 1066, and here we are in Hastings. The rest is tapestry, castles, and cookery.

Erik, Olav, and Max were brought together not by a star but by their own stardom. The ad-

vance of technological communications over the last twenty years has enabled unprecedented advances in musical collaboration and re-imagining. This supreme trio is fully representative of this – a kind of re-positioning of classical music, not just in the staid respectable middle England suburbs where nice people applaud politely and go back home to agreeable suppers and fine wines, but as a central genre to be joyfully embraced, learned from. Jazz has long been incorporated into music of the classical genre: composers have introduced jazz cadences and rhythms into their

symphonies, concertos, preludes, and sonatas – Satie, Debussy, then more obviously Copeland, Gershwin, Bernstein. Many more have similarly incorporated folk music.

So although classical music has often transcended the barriers of form, it is only comparatively recently that the ‘genre’ has been opened up to a newly-receptive kind of audience. So it is that we can now hear erstwhile royal harpist, Catrin Finch, making beautiful music with virtuoso African Kora master Seckou Keita, or conversely Vikingur Olafsson playing Bach with notable imagination and originality, reaching out with rhythmic perfection to the farthest corners of the listening public. Olafsson, Icelandic genius, also a Viking, is interested in nurturing the roots and branches of Bach that reach into almost all music written in the Western world since.

So here we are, back to Bach and this Viking trio. Much of what they played in the church can be found on their album, *Bach to Folk*, which I thoroughly recommend. It’s beautiful. But very few albums can transmit the sheer love and delight that these three excellent musicians have in making music together, and their pleasure in offering it to listeners. Erik Rydval plays an extraordinary instrument: the nyckelharpa, a quintessential Swedish folk instrument dating from the 14th century. It looks like a cross between a violin and a hurdy-gurdy, and adds glorious drone and resonance to every piece – very much in evidence in Baillie’s own *Rolling to Røros*.

Røros is the town where Olav Mjelva lives. Mjelva plays a traditional Norwegian instrument, the Hardanger fiddle (hardingfele), often tuned differently from a nor-

mal violin and played with a different technique. Read the Wikipedia entry for this instrument – it’s fascinating, full of myth, trolls and dragons. Nothing troll-like about Mjelva, though – like the other two musicians in the ensemble, he’s a clear musical force, and witty with it.

Baillie loves Bach, loves to explore the connections between Bach’s music and traditional folk music. With this trio he has the perfect vehicle. It’s one thing to know *about* the musical connections, quite another to present the connections to the audience at this level of internal blend, tuning, accomplishment, and panache. His own violin, made in 1845 by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume in Paris, has a glorious tone – cinnamon and oranges, wood fires and furs. And for me, concerts without music stands mediating the transmission of the sound to the listeners are always the most rewarding.

The Lodestar has of course a whole other significance – it’s the star that, in the story, guides three kings to the cradle of Jesus. Whatever your belief system, it’s a good story, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And here were three kings of their instruments, guided by who knows which star, making towards a rare interpretative freshness, a completely non-traditional way of presenting tradition.

■ *The Lodestar Trio played at Christ Church St Leonards on Sunday 26 November as part of a national tour.*

The Paul Gunn Ensemble at Kino-Teatr

VICTORIA KINGHAM

On the theme of new, once impossible, collaborative opportunities, the Kino presented once again, on a cold Thursday evening, a high-quality but entirely unclassifiable musical performance.

All but one of the numbers came out of the imaginative brain of Paul Gunn, an entirely self-taught, self-motivated pianist and composer. The musical arrangements are written down, but with plenty of space for improvisation. Gunn tells me frankly that since he does not read music, all the transcription and arranging is done by the cellist, Helen Thomas, in her rare moments away from performing with the Royal Philharmonic Or-

chestra or recording with Wynton Marsalis. It’s a labour of love – the overall result is effective, eclectic, sometimes magnetic.

The band is fronted by Thomas, centre stage – in itself an original arrangement. The saxophone on this occasion was played by local hero Josephine Davies with an impressive command over both tenor and soprano. Implacable American bass player Leslee Booth, schooled out of Los Angeles Musicians Institute, has thirty years of experience playing with top American soul and jazz acts. With South American drummer David Rohoman (long time member of Kilburn and the High Roads) he provided, on fretted electric bass, a solid inventive rhythm section.



Paul Gunn

The musicians may have an international background, but there is something peculiarly British about a song title like Two Part Invention in Ground Floor Flat Minor. High Tea for Hattie sounds almost regional but in fact Hattie’s Tea Room is in Ashford – Paul lives in Tunbridge Wells. *The Riddle* is a setting of a poem by Hilaire Belloc, that oh-so-English half-French satirist. *The Open Road* mentions a ‘tube fare.’ *Ludwig’s Nice Bottle*

of *Red* brings Beethoven into a pleasantly bohemian British living-room evening: “We all know,” laughs Gunn, “that he was partial to a snifter.”

Gunn is an engaging and charismatic band leader. He made his living as a gymnast, mime artist and actor for 20 years. His approach to music, not formally moulded, is very much his own, and this whimsical yet very accomplished ensemble is a unique creation; his songs

reflect his own diverse background. Personally, I would have preferred to see a slightly more intimate setting for a band with this kind of personality; the Kino is lovely but sometimes the sound floats up and away into the splendid old proscenium arch. Great evening, though: I look forward to the next time.

■ *The Paul Gunn Ensemble appear in Hastings on Sunday 5 May 2024, 11 am at The Stables Theatre.*



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ARTS

Elegance, Modernism, Romance – Ulucan and Roberts at a Kino-Teatr Coffee Concert



Peter Mould

VICTORIA KINGHAM

The late-morning stage at St Leonards Kino-Teatr looks plain and elegant, a vase of flowers placed on a small table to the right, a grand piano, a music stand. Ayşen Ulucan enters, a neat, slight figure in black, looking little more than a teenager.

There is nothing slight or understated about her violin technique, however, which is clear virtuoso. She introduces the first piece comprehensively: the Romance for violin and piano by Korrel Szymanowski, a Polish composer perhaps less well-known in the UK than he ought to be. This 1910 composition is a modernist exploration, beautiful, haunting, full of unresolved cadences and unexpected intervals, traversing the whole range of the violin, with a central short explosive motif mellowing to a quieter, extended, simpler final chord resolution at the end. 'Make it new', was the modernists' vow in every branch of the arts in the first two decades of the twentieth century: there were no musical clichés here.

The next piece (which Kenneth Roberts introduced beforehand) was the A Major violin and piano sonata by César Franck. Dated 1886, it is one of Franck's best-

known pieces and, though musically complex, has a more familiar harmonic resonance. As Roberts had explained, it is cyclical, so the deceptively simple initial theme develops through the next three movements via a turbulent statement, a questioning, but gentle, third movement, and a quietly triumphant final movement that ends with a ringing return to the original melody, unadorned and memorable.

After a nominal interval came two Dvořák Slavonic Dances, and an encore of gorgeous Rachmaninoff. The Vocalise, composed for (non-verbal) voice, but more often arranged for other instruments, is recognisable by almost everyone whether they are classical music aficionados or merely casual listeners. Rachmaninoff's works have instant appeal. Despite having been composed later than the Szymanowski, the piece is unashamedly Romantic, and like most of his work, elicits an immediate emotional response engendered wholly in its musical construction.

This duo brings together a profusion of musical understanding, virtuosity, and scholarship. Ulucan is a member of an exceptionally musical family from Turkey and has, since her early youth,

performed extensively in Europe both as a soloist and with her equally gifted brother and sister. She is now a St Leonards resident, frequently contributing to the exceptional local classical music scene. She plays a mellow-toned 19th century German violin of which, she tells me, the maker is unknown.

Kenneth Roberts explained during the course of his introduction that one of the most challenging aspects of Franck's music is that Franck had famously large hands. Franck wrote music that he was physically capable of playing – spanning intervals of an octave and a half – that presented challenges for future players. Roberts himself is Hastings born and has a long and distinguished musical career in England and the USA. In addition to his stellar piano performances, he composes, directs, and arranges all varieties of orchestral music, gives lecture recitals, and is currently resident conductor of the Sussex Concert Orchestra.

Once again, we are privileged to live in this endlessly musical town.

■ Ayşen Ulucan will perform the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in St Leonards in April 2024

The Space Between the Shadows

SARAH MILNE

Electro Studios is about to host the premiere of an exciting and ambitious multi-sensory installation by emerging local artist Richard Best. *The Space Between the Shadows: Apotheosis* is a massive work that addresses massive themes - universal consciousness and connection to the Source through religion and science - with a focus on structure and balance.

Richard is an intuitive artist, fascinated by language, communication and symbols. His work is informed by study and acceptance of a universal consciousness, with a strong drive to discover the key to finding ourselves within it.

Richard has travelled this path for over twenty years. At eighteen, he learned to be an artist by training himself how to look: to develop a visual language connecting everything he learned. Late in 2019, Covid, together with a journey of personal development, provided

the opportunity he needed to have the space and time to make large-scale works. Richard began working on a series of paintings that would lead him to his 'Unity' series: large canvasses depicting cosmic themes and symbolism. He joined the inaugural cohort of Hastings Art School last year, and the education and critique he received, from tutor Julia Kotziamani and his colleagues on the program, enabled him to develop his work into the installation he will unveil in St Leonards on 15 December.

COSMIC SYMBOLISM

The exhibition will have at its centre an immense twenty-five metre painting that will occupy the full landing gallery at Electro Studios Project Space. He will present the vast painting as an installation, with curated lighting sequences and sound. The multisensory involvement serves to amplify the cosmic narratives in the painting, to elicit feelings of wonder about



Courtesy of Richard Best

He asks that viewers come with an open mind to stop, look at the universe and think about its origins and their place in it.

"As a people, throughout all time, we have found names, languages, symbols, idols and rituals that bring us close to knowing the unfathomable One: a godhead, deity, or source. Through science we develop complicated tools to see further into the macro and the micro. We have an insatiable urge to understand the very fabric of reality. As ideas combine, as globalisation occurs, as human rights develop, we benefit from the collective wisdom of a universal understanding. In collecting wisdom, we must unify in its interpretation to best serve the future of our species, our planet, and our purpose in the universe. This work seeks to provide a space for individual reflection on the profound and elusive journey of understanding why we are here."

■ *The Space Between the Shadows: Apotheosis* by Richard Best is at Electro Studios Project Space, Landing Gallery, from 16-17 December 2023, 12-6pm, with a Private View on Friday 15 December, 6-9pm. Further info: richartbest.com

the universe. Richard's aim is "to create a space that enables viewers to become fully immersed in the work, a space so removed from

the outside world that the audience is transfixed, enveloped, and affected by the themes, content, and sensation."



ARTS

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Raymond McChrystal

Disappearing Banksys: Save Them or Let Them Fade Away?

RAYMOND MCCHRYSTAL

St Leonards and Venice have something in common. Both towns are struggling with the conservation of murals that street artist Banksy has created on their walls. In Venice his mural, titled *Migrant Child* (2019), is painted on the wall of a building along the Rio Novo canal in the heart of Venice's Dorsoduro district. It depicts a child holding up a flare and wearing a life vest. The Banksy mural in St Leonards was painted in 2010 onto the back of a concrete stairway leading down to the beach. It shows a small child in sunglasses building sandcastles, each labelled with the word 'Tesco'. Because of their sites, both

murals are now under threat due to environmental factors.

In May of this year, while walking along St Leonards seafront, I popped my head over the railing to look at the Banksy, and was concerned to see that the image was no longer visible. At beach level I could see that the mural had been covered with Perspex. Sea water and rainwater are now getting behind the covering and causing major problems. Some of the water is penetrating the concrete and causing a reaction resulting in staining seeping out from within the wall onto the image. Other water is condensing on the inside of the Perspex and causing the cycle to continue. The image has deteriorated and is

threatened with more of the same.

In June I went to see our local councillor, Tony Collins. He was very quick to raise the matter within the relevant council departments. The response boils down to the fact that the council has neither money nor resources to deal with the situation effectively. Attempts have been made to prevent erosion by pebbles, and the Perspex is to protect it from graffiti and rain. As it is hardly visible as a Banksy anymore, the graffiti appears incognito.

Since raising my concerns in June, the council have now completely covered the mural with a sheet of plywood. This, to my mind, will only make matters worse, as sunlight cannot then drive away the moisture. I have tried to contact the Banksy Collective by sending them pictures and a description of what is going on.

At banksy.co.uk you can click 'outside' on the sidebar, and the St Leonards mural is the 49th image. You can also appreciate from the photograph, presumably taken by him at the moment of completion, how much it has deteriorated. I am a paper conservator by profession, so I spend my working life saving deteriorating and damaged artefacts. It concerns me to see a work like this suffering such damage and neglect.

In Venice, the moral arguments about the importance of Banksy's work, as against his intention to place the mural in a deliberately challenging environmental position, have ended with a stalemate. Tourists' requests for boat trips to include the Rio Novo canal prove how popular it is, yet the wake from the boats is now a major cause of its erosion. Save it, or let it fade away?

Moving Mountains: Writing Nature Through Illness & Disability

LOUISE KENWARD

Through twenty-five pieces of prose, poetry, and artwork, this new anthology offers a vision of nature that encompasses the close up, the microscopic, and the vast. From a single falling raindrop to the enormity of the north wind, this is nature experienced wholly and acutely. *Moving Mountains* is not about overcoming or conquering, but about living with and connecting, shifting the reader's attention to the things easily overlooked by those who move through the world untroubled by the body that carries them.

Moving Mountains has been developed over the last three years. An Arts Council England award in 2021 enabled the commissioning of contributors, and the collection has now been published by Footnote Press. Described as 'exquisite', this is a first-of-its-kind collection of nature writing by disabled authors and writers who live with chronic illness. Within a genre typically filled with determined physical accomplishments and dexterity, *Moving Mountains* instead offers up a diverse experience from the well-trodden narratives of nature writing, of climbing mountains and trekking off-road trails. It is a collection of experiences of embodied connec-



tions, engagements with the environment around us and the communities we belong to. It raises pertinent issues regarding the climate crisis and the escalating rise in chronic illness, and the interrelation of both of these.

As well as the editor being a creative local to Hastings, so are three of the contributors. Poet Dillon Jaxx, and artists Isobel Anderson and Lorna Crabbe, all have work included in *Moving Mountains*. Other contributors range from as far away as Indonesia, North America, and Singapore, but also hail from places covering the length of England and Scotland, from Hastings to Shetland. This is an international book with a wide reach and a local core.

Iago Banet – a Star Still Rising

Described as "a master of the guitar" by Sean Rafferty, BBC Radio 3 *In Tune*, as "nothing short of phenomenal" in a recent review, and as a "highly recommended artist" by Celtic Connections, Iago Banet creates stories without words, entrancing audiences as he does so.

Iago Banet, 'The Galician King of Acoustic Guitar' launched his third album, *TRES*, earlier this year, with a tour which has included multiple sell-out shows and sensational receptions from audiences across the UK. He has showcased his immense

talent at festivals including Brecon Jazz Festival, Hellys International Guitar Festival and Aberjazz, displaying new levels of skill, complexity and versatility, fusing styles ranging from gypsy jazz, blues, Americana, Country and Dixieland to swing, pop and folk.

Since 2018, Banet has built an impressive career as a solo fingerstyle acoustic guitarist, displaying his exceptional abilities and receiving rave reviews along the way. He has performed with Josh Smith (Joe Bonamassa), Mark

Flanagan (Jools Holland and his Rhythm and Blues Orchestra), Jack Broadbent and Clive Carroll, amongst others.

Iago was born in Galicia in the north-west of Spain. As a teenager, he found a classical guitar at home and set about learning to master it. From that moment, there was no going back: guitar became his passion, his obsession and his future. Iago's technique and approach to performance have captivated crowds across the UK and Spain. He is a one-man-band on acoustic guitar not to be missed.

■ Iago Banet will play at the Kino-Teatr, Norman Road, at 7.30 pm on 12 January 2024. Tickets at ticketsource.co.uk/kinoteatr/t-xmrggna





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ARTS

Carols for All

Hastings Philharmonic Choir (HPC) will present their annual *Carols for All* concert on Saturday 16 December at the beautiful Christ Church, Silchester Road, St Leonards starting at 5pm.

Carols evolved from midwinter songs, sung to keep up everyone's spirits along with dancing and feasting. By the 15th century they were established as Christmas carols. Many of today's well-known carols were made popular by the Victorians, including *O Come All Ye Faithful* based on the Latin *Adeste Fideles*, first translated into English in 1841. *Away in a Manger* first appeared in the USA in the 1880s though its origins are hazy. The lyrics for *Hark the Herald*

Angels Sing were originally written by Charles Wesley (1707-88) who, with his brother John, founded the Christian denomination of Methodism. The tune we know today was composed by Felix Mendelssohn in 1840.

The choir can trace its history back to 1928, starting with a highly successful performance of Handel's *Messiah*. Nearly 100 years later, under its musical director, Marcio da Silva, the HPC has established itself as one of the foremost choirs in the area. While centering on the Baroque and Romantic periods, the choir's repertoire extends to many twentieth century classics. More recent concerts have included works by Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Brahms, Verdi, Orff, Britten and Lauridsen.

■ *More details and tickets:*
hastingsphilchoir.org.uk/carols-forall2023

Surprise Recital at Friends' Celebration

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Fairlight Hall recently hosted a party to acknowledge the support of friends and patrons of Hastings International Piano Competition. The competition, launched just thirty years ago, has evolved into one of the premier British music competitions and is internationally acclaimed. This year it has just announced the exciting news that composer, writer, painter and internationally-renowned concert pianist Sir Stephen Hough has agreed to be its patron.

During the evening, there was an unexpected recital given by the American Kenny Broberg, who won the competition in 2017; he is now, rightly, highly-regarded as a concert pianist across the USA and internationally. The stage was shared by violinist Sara Dragan, who at 23 years old has already won a violin Grand Prix, numerous awards and competitions, recorded her first CD, and played thousands of concerts.

Not only was I stunned by their astonishing techniques and highly sensitive performances, but was also educated by their choice of composers. Dragan introduced two sonatas by Leopold Godowsky, a



Lithuanian-born American virtuoso composer, pianist, and teacher. Beautiful, lyrical, profound, these sonatas are complex works only attempted by highly-accomplished musicians.

Godowsky's lyrical searching phrases, with multiple changes in time signature and key, are a joy to listen to. His work is probably less well-known in this country than it should be, and the same applies to Nikolai Medtner, lifelong friend of Rachmaninoff.

Broberg played solo piano on two of his *Skazki* (Fairy-tales) where the right and left hand chase one another (as do the elves in the fairy-tale) and the melodic lines weave in and out in an evocative, whimsical and staccato way, with endless darting changes of tempo. I've been listening to them again and again since, on my favourite streaming service, but to hear them played live, so brilliantly, was a rare privilege, especially in this unique setting.

■ *Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition no 17 takes place in 2024 between 22 February and 2 March. Further details:* hastingsinternationalpiano.org/concerto-competition.



Catherine Rajhans

The House of the Stone that Spoke

GAIL BORROW

ExploreTheArch is the UK's theatre of domestic life located in a 'theatre house' in St Leonards-on-Sea. The inter-disciplinary arts collective mount three experiential productions a year at this venue, along with their international installation work and community arts practice projects.

The forthcoming production is located in evocative attic spaces, areas not opened to the public before. Ukrainian harp duo Elizabeth Isadora and Catherine Rajhans and their mother, yarn artist Anna Smirnova, invite audiences into their intriguing inner world to explore the lyrical stories of their ancestors through live harp music drifting through the walls of the domestic rooms. Spoken thoughts and reflections echo through the rooms while evocative film excerpts and magical stringed shadows dance across the walls of this William

Morris era building. The wild outside weaves through the architectural features of the cosy interior.

Relocating to Hastings from Kyiv, the performers found that they were inspired to explore the lives of inspiring women from the Kyivan Rus kingdom who trod similar journeys across Europe 1,000 years ago. The team conjure intrepid princesses, Anastasia, Anna and Elisiv, who travelled to become influential political figures in kingdoms located in what is now Germany and Hungary, France and an area across Scandinavia. It was in Norway where Elisiv married Harald, the ambitious politician and fighter, who was later defeated by Harold of England at Stamford Bridge in England.

Hastings' mediaeval history has inspired this production not only because of its 11th-century narratives but also because of its beautiful coastline. The trio have spent much time exploring stones along the shore, finding that rocks help to connect to their place of birth and other heritage lands. Catherine, Elizabeth and Anna share how stones speak to them as global connectors and how the act of finding offers tangible connections to historical stories steeped in myth and legend.

Tickets for a one-hour show are £15+booking fee via eventbrite: eventbrite.co.uk +the house of the stone that spoke. Archer Lodge,



Elizabeth

Charles Road, St Leonards-on-Sea. Under 19s able to book free tickets to accompany adult ticket holders by emailing explorers@explorethearch.com

Accessibility: the attic rooms are reached via two flights of stairs. ExploreTheArch regrets that there is no lift in the Victorian venue. Please email with accessibility queries.

The production runs in tandem with ExploreTheArch's Fossil Finder In Us All project at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery. All info: explorethearch.com

■ *22 December 2023-5 January 2024 at 7.30pm, Charles Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, TN34 0QX, opposite Markwick Gardens.*

SCRABBLE!

Is it more than just a game to you? Do you like to play by the rules? Do you want to know how to score more, learn more words, stick to one dictionary? Are you a word game addict, do you always want another one?

If so, look no further than your immediate neighbourhood. There is a small but enthusiastic club in Hastings which is looking for additional enthusiastic (not necessarily small) members and would like to welcome you on a Thursday afternoon between 2 and 5 pm. If daytimes are too busy for you, regular evening club nights can also be arranged. What better pastime on a cold winter evening than playing the eleven anagrams of RETAINS or learning common words like SAOUARI, ETAERIO, TSIGANE, PTERION?

■ *Details can be obtained from* verambell@yahoo.com *or phone* 07517 240212



LITERATURE

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BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

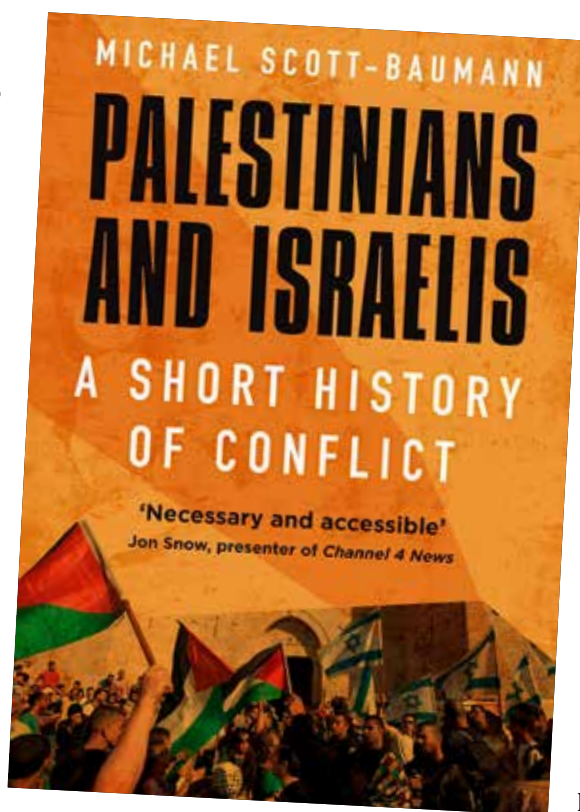
Palestinians and Israelis: A Short History of Conflict

Published by The History Press,
RRP £12.99

REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

In Deuteronomy, Chapter 31, Moses claims 'the Lord' promised a swath of land west of Jordan to the Israelites, saying 'the Lord shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed'. In Chapter 34, 'the Lord shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan; And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost Sea; And to the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar.' In the next book, Joshua says 'unto the children of Israel' that 'the living God is among you, and that he will drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.'

This assault, expulsion, and genocidal war on local tribes by another tribe 'out of Egypt' led, by the Iron Age, to a Kingdom of Israel that covers at its northern extremity all the land within its current borders, down to a few miles north of Jerusalem, with a small zone extra to the east. Below, and including Jerusalem, belonged



to the kingdom of Judah (and, east of the Dead Sea, Moab) and on the coast 'the Philistine city states', including Gaza. South of that was the land of the Arubu tribes.

UNPICKING PAST INJUSTICES LEAVES EVERY EMPEROR NAKED

The Canaanites are sometimes claimed as the predecessors of modern day 'Palestinians', who then would precede the Israelites claim to the territory. Modern day Zionism was birthed in Europe, so all sides in a debate on 'whose land is it?' face complications. The transfer of tribal lands through war has been part of our history throughout the world for millennia. Modern international law regards such displacement as criminal, and unpicking past injustices leaves every emperor naked.

Of more use is genetics. And, in

those terms, ones that ignore contingent religious affiliation. Today's Palestinians in the main have two roots. The Christian Palestinians are one, and the other share genetic features with, maternally, a proportion of sub-Saharan DNA and, primarily, the same genetic markers as the pre-WWII indigenous Jewish population (Ashkenazi, Iranian, and Moroccan Jews). Some of the European genetic stock in today's Israel are more complex. However, the takeaway here is that, bar religion, these are to a significant degree the same peoples.

Irony – and ancient history – aside, the current crises emerged from the 1930s and 1940s. This puts the British Empire in the frame for a good deal of the instability in the Middle East, which is not news. The Germans, too, had suggested Israel as a deportation spot (and Argentina, amongst other locations) when 'negotiating' migrations as 'a solution' to Hitler's 'problem' to senior rabbis in Germany. Even before 1948, some of those frontier settlers already in the Palestine were waging a low-intensity war against the British, as well as covert collective punishment against those already resident. Palestine and Lebanon had cities that looked much as ours did, wore western clothing, and drove cars: they were not generally a population of nomadic

Bedouin with no fixed home. It was short work destroying them.

RIGHT FROM THE PAGES OF DEUTERONOMY AND JOSHUA

The first real blowback went badly for the natives and rather well for the embryonic Israeli state. The first major war left an Israel that was to a degree exclusionary, and far greater in extent than the British had planned. The next serious blowback, in 1967, had dramatic impact too. Israel's position has never been conciliatory toward its neighbours. This has, clearly, been reciprocated, and cause-and-effect is opaque at best. But the roots of today's Gazan War precede the cross-border attacks on Israel by Hamas, a body that as tightly controls the people of Gaza as Israel does the incredibly-shrinking Palestinian settlements in the West Bank. Settlers from Israel, and the Jewish diaspora, seem to have jumped right from the pages of Deuteronomy and Joshua. In today's international order, this is not acceptable, although pragmatically accepted by Israel's chief western allies, Britain and the USA. Nor is Islamist territorial expansionism.

It is, and will remain, a mess for as many generations ahead as behind, though the current conflict as persecuted by Netanyahu's far-right coalition government aims to 'solve' a significant proportion of the mess. In 'eye-for-an-eye' terms, the assault on Gaza goes way beyond a proportionate response, 'collective punishment' being business as usual since the mid-1940s. The West's attitude is similar to that felt after 9/11, where 'the others' are, weighed in the balance, apparently much less important or valuable than 'us'. The rest of the world, especially in the middle-east, have of course seen and been offended by this exceptionalism, so we can expect more 'blowback' any time soon.

In the meantime, you could do a lot worse than gen up on the background to the conflict than grabbing a copy of Michael Scott-Baumann's *Palestinians and Israelis*, which is updated to October 7th, and is far more worthwhile than reading, for example, Howard Jacobson's irrational Zionist screeds or propaganda from Hamas!

■ Available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road, Hastings TN34 1RE

POETRY CORNER

WAR

PETER DALTON

What does it mean, we are going to war
Such a small word, such a monumental meaning
Who is going to war though
Those cowardly and fancy worded politicians
Or is it men like you and I
No desire, no statement of intent
Yet off we're shipped to defend democracy
Whose democracy is it though
Is my version of democratic freedom
The same as your version
The orators orate behind the barriers
Whilst those without a voice
Are sent to do their dirty work
The media heralds and trumpets the cause
Brave, valiant, heroic soldiers
As civilian casualties spiral out of control
Out of control and quickly glossed over
We call ourselves civilized
Yet make a complete mockery of the word
What will it take to end all wars
How much misery, how much death
Before we finally wake up to its futility
We are all one, we are all connected
We are all on the same ship called planet earth
Ultimately we will sink together or swim together

CROSSWORD CORNER

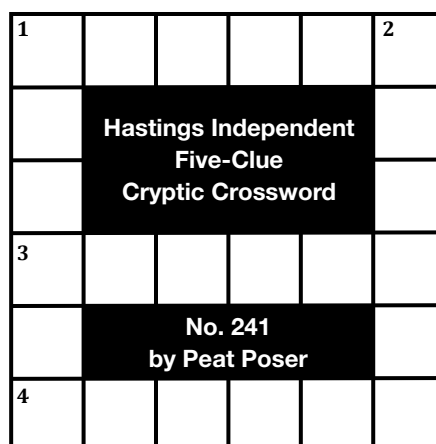
Across

- Old biker's chair (6)
- Tilt head back to search for information (4,2)
- Small carpet maker's sport (6)

Down

- Bowls player's car (6)
- Murderer's particularly good in Australia (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 7 of The HIP List





TEAM SPORTS

2023: Highs and Lows of the Competitive Year



Scott White

Chris Agutter and Ben Cornelius reunited at Pilot Field

HUGH SULLIVAN

FOOTBALL

It's been a tumultuous year off the field for Hastings United. The quashing of the long-pursued ambition of owners Daren Burney and Peter Sherlock to relocate the home stadium from Pilot Field to Tilekiln led not only to their own departure and sale of the club; CEO Billy Wood, manager Gary Elphick and most of his team went as well. Incoming manager Paul Barnes, compelled to find a virtually new squad of players, lasted only two months of the new season.

Yet, from the perspective of longer-standing supporters, the outcome this December feels oddly stabilised. Not only is it likely that the club will now stay at Pilot Field for the foreseeable future. Former stalwart 'U's player Dean White and his son Ben head the boardroom. Among Barnes' new on-field recruits were two former academy prospects Adam Lovatt and Davide Rodari returning from League 2 clubs, both better and stronger for a couple of years away in more exalted company. Elphick's predecessor as manager, Chris Agutter, is back at the helm after similar professional experience at Stevenage, with former coach Ben Cornelius also reinstated. Another former academy high-flyer, Jack Bates, has re-joined on loan.

Agutter has immediately reversed the team's eight-match losing run in league and major cups to gain six wins in his first eight matches. In this form they

look capable of not just protecting their status in the Isthmian Premier League, but of pushing for a top five play-off place.

CRICKET

Hastings & St Leonards Priory captain Tom Gillespie predicted at the start of the 2023 season that, while they lacked star players, their strength in depth would see them do well in Division 2 of the Sussex League, having been relegated from the Premier Division the previous summer.

That's exactly how it turned out. With every player in the side capable of making a significant contribution with bat, ball or both, they finished equal on points with Worthing at the top of the league table, taking the championship by a marginal differential in their head-to-head contests with the West Sussex side.

Harry Scowen scored a couple of centuries at the top of the batting line-up, and generally he and/

or Dylan Woolley could be relied upon to give the side a good start. No other batsmen finished among the top 30 run-scorers of the division, so that high total scores were rarely achieved, and crucial individual innings were interspersed with a certain propensity for batting collapses.

The bowling attack, on the other hand, was very steady, with few weak links. John Morgan claimed 41 wickets with his seamers and was well supported by pace bowlers Satchi Mahendran and Alex Barton (when available), while Seaver Cowley, Adam Page and Aussie recruit Alex Osborne all took wickets regularly.

Gillespie experienced an indifferent season with the bat, but he – and, when he was absent, Scowen as his deputy – enjoyed a remarkable run of fortune at the toss-up, winning 14 out of 16, including the last ten in succession. Almost invariably, that meant putting opponents in to bat, keeping them to a modest score, then finding just enough resilience somewhere in the batting order to overhaul it. In the last five completed games the target was never more than 136, Priory winning successively by five wickets, then by four, again by four, by seven and finally by two, as last opponents Brighton and Hove, bowled out for 98 (and already relegated), almost wrecked their victory march.

Next summer, back once more in the Premier League, Priory will need to find a lot more consistency in their batting. However, with youngsters like Woolley, Cowley, Iden McCleave and Harvey Faulkner, all matured in comparison to two seasons ago, they should be equipped to hold their own.

HOCKEY

South Saxons continue to field four men's and two women's teams in the South East Hockey league, all managing to play their home games on the ageing sand-dressed astro-turf pitch at Horntye. They've



Dave Young

Hastings Priory cricketers - significant contributions from all



Peter Knight

H & B: a close-knit bunch of players

known for several years now that they're likely to need another home if the proposed redevelopment of the cricket ground alongside goes ahead. Claremont School still seems the most likely destination.

Jeremy Bunday, chairman for the previous 20 years, has finally found a successor – Toby Reed, himself a player with the club for virtually the whole of that period and former first team captain, has stepped up in his place.

On the field, the ladies' first team won a thrilling three-way contest for the 2022-23 Division 1 Martlets League title. They went into their final match at home to Brighton & Hove equal on points at the head of the league table with Mid-Sussex and with Middleton. Saxons secured a tight 2-0 victory, whilst their rivals could only manage a draw and a defeat between them.

This season, promoted to Division 1 East, the team has – as expected – found the standard rather tougher. A record of one win and seven defeats in their first ten matches needs to be improved. Established players Kat Jenner, Caitlin Merison and Abbie Merison remain the team's leading lights, but a number of young players have also caught the eye. Sadly, 18-year-old defender Sophie Ford, who gained an award as young player of the year, has died since.

The men's first team, playing at the equivalent level in their own Division 1 East, are similarly finding it hard going. They kept their status at the end of last season but, having won just two matches out of ten this autumn, it will be another struggle this time round. Paddy Cornish, captain for the last six years, has given way to Lloyd Williams.

RUGBY

Hastings & Bexhill (H & B) have suffered a chastening year in terms of results on the field. They were relegated from the Counties 2 Kent League in March, after losing nine of their ten matches from January onwards – some by narrow margins to teams they might have beaten on another day, some by crushing scorelines, particular-

ly when confronted by the 2nd XVs of larger clubs. Able to field several individual players accustomed to the power and pace of higher league rugby and/or aided by commercial sponsors, these teams tend to overwhelm their literally smaller opponents.

This autumn, H & B have found a similar pattern in the lower 3 Kent League. After an early 64-19 thrashing of Whitstable, they came up against the old boy 2nd XVs of Tonbridge Judd and Alleyns respectively and found each too strong. As a result of gaps in the schedule during the Rugby World Cup and a postponement due to extreme wet weather, they then played only one further match between the end of September and mid-November – another loss, to Gravesend 2nds.

What has held them back in this campaign has been a series of serious injuries. Captain Harry Walker broke his arm in the opening game. Former captain Bruce Steadman has been sidelined with a shoulder injury, as has key second row forward Calvin Crosby-Clarke (shoulder, also) and Michael Clifford (broken thumb). Flying winger Tom Hirst suffered a broken arm in the match against Sittingbourne. There's also the perennial problem of absences for other commitments. H & B had five league points docked when they were unable to fulfil a league fixture against Old Elthamians for lack of front row forwards.

However, recent home victories over New Ash Green and Sittingbourne have lifted morale, star flanker Frazer McManus has returned after absence through work, and there's an expectation that H & B will not face further relegation at the season's end.

The coaching team of Steve McManus and David Hirst, former players and youth coaches within the club, provide experience and reassuring continuity to a close-knit bunch of players, most of whom have come up through junior ranks. In the meantime, youth and girls' rugby has been flourishing at the club: its longer term future seems in good hands.

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