

Hastings Independent

Your local non-profit community newspaper

Hastings Independent Press



ISSUE 242 FORTNIGHTLY

FRIDAY 5 JANUARY 2024

FREE

www.hastingsindependentpress.co.uk



LABOUR PULLED APART

REBEL GROUP QUIT PARTY BUT STILL LEAD COUNCIL

Jason Ellis

HUGH SULLIVAN

On 13 December a full meeting of Hastings Borough Council approved budget proposals for 2024-25 aimed at saving around £4m, coupling increased fees and charges with planned reductions in staff costs.

Labour Party councillors and Cllr Lucien Fernando, who is now affiliated to Reform UK, voted in favour; Conservatives and Greens abstained. Council leader Paul Barnett issued a statement expressing pleasure that the proposals – put together by council of-

ficers on the instruction of his cabinet – had been adopted. “We will be able to start work in January on the proposals so that we have the best chance of making these savings,” he declared.

But on the same day, he and all but one of his cabinet colleagues announced their resignation – not from their cabinet positions but from membership of the national Labour Party. Cllrs Barnett, Maya Evans, Simon Willis, Andy Batsford, John Cannan and Ali Roark, all previously elected as Labour representatives, issued a joint press release announcing that they

would be forming a new group styled Hastings Independents. They dissociated themselves from the national Labour Party, which “no longer provides us with the policies, the support or the focus on local government that we need”.

Cllr Barnett made a personal statement setting out his own reasons. “With sadness, anger and regret I have today resigned from the Labour Party. I will stay as an independent councillor doing my best for Hastings. Others are making the same decision, and together we will form a new Hastings Independents group. There are

many reasons, but for me I just want to be able to speak out for Hastings without being told what to think, say and do by people in London”.

His colleagues have echoed his complaints about control of the local constituency party being exerted top-down from the Labour Party central HQ. Cllr Batsford has described the machinations of those at the South East Regional Office as “odious and threatening... they see Hastings just as a flag on a map. Why am I giving time and effort to benefit the brand of a

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NEWS

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Happy New Year. A very special one for HIP since - incredibly - the newspaper celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2024, appearing fortnightly (aside from online-only during peak-Covid) for a decade. No mean feat for a paper written and produced by volunteers and financed solely from advertising and the occasional fundraiser - read about our most recent bash on the back page.

Produced over the winter holiday, this issue is slimmer than usual. If, following festive overindulgence, you'd like to emulate it, check out our community and listings pages for keep fit classes.

We've also got arts previews and details of many other activities to bring light and company to dull winter days. You might start with a visit to The Fishermen's Museum, possibly the Old Town's most venerable attraction and the subject of the features section.

The news pages are dominated by a big political story which broke during Christmas: the defection of eight councillors: a consequent almost 50/50 split within the Labour group on the Council. The leavers complain of heavy-handed, top-down control by Labour's central and regional offices, blocking the wishes of local people. Something which may prove to a bellwether clash, reflected across the country and a possible problem for Kier Starmer in an election year.

During this year we'll be revealing a redesign and celebrating HIP's birthday. Details to follow.

Deal Revealed

The Hastings Town Deal team will be hosting an open day at Priory Meadow shopping centre on Saturday 27 January to provide residents, businesses and visitors with updates on the various projects going forward within the £24.3m Town Deal regeneration programme.

Some of these projects have already been effectively completed and are up and running – or, in the case of Owens Entertainment Centre, up and apparently down again. The Town Deal website refers to seven overarching projects, forming an overall programme as follows:

- Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections: the aim is to 'transform' the town centre into a 'Garden Town', with sustainable horticultural plantings, improved pathways for pedestrians and cyclists and enhanced infrastructure for markets, events and festivals.
- Hastings Castle World Heritage Destination: what's currently described as a "neglected, inaccessible ruin" is to become the future centrepiece of the town's tourist economy, with a new interpretation centre on the site of the vacant West Hill cafe.
- Enterprise and Employment Infrastructure: the upper floors of the old Debenhams building have been turned into flexible office and



Naz Montag

community space managed by Freedom Works; away from the town centre, 29 small business 'incubator' units have been built on two storeys at the Churchfields industrial estate.

- Green Low Carbon Skills and Economy: a new Green technology centre of excellence is in course of building at the East Sussex College campus in Ore; meanwhile, a partnership between Plumpton College and Hastings charity Education Futures Trust will offer land-oriented training and learning facilities at Lacuna Place in the town centre and at The Firs on Elphinstone Road.
- Town to Sea Creative Quarter: major works have already been advanced at the Observer Building and adjacent sites, managed by community land trust Hastings Commons – the focus is on arts, culture, wellbeing and digital services.
- Town Living: the aim is to deliver "quality affordable rented housing" in the town

centre, though so far little detail has been given as to which sites are proposed to be either repurposed or built anew.

- Town Centre Core: a "strategic joint venture" between Hastings Borough Council and New River Real Estate Investment Trust to regenerate commercial areas of the town centre – again, little detail has yet been made publicly available on this, but New River describes itself as focused primarily on retail and leisure property.

The stated aim of the full programme is: "to rejuvenate and transform the town centre and make Hastings a healthy, vibrant, and quirky seaside town that people love to visit, live and work in".

■ For further information, visit the central hub at Priory Meadow on 27 January. It will be manned between 10am and 4pm by members of the team and project leads, to whom questions may be put. Those interested may sign up to attend guided tours for some of the projects.

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HASTINGS TIDES

DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES				SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 5 JAN	H4:45am	L11:37am	H5:34pm	L11:59pm	7:59	4:06	
SAT 6 JAN	H5:552am	L12:46pm	H6:43pm		7:58	4:07	
SUN 7 JAN	L1:17am	H6:59am	L1:54pm	H7:43pm	7:58	4:08	
MON 8 JAN	L2:27am	H7:59am	L2:57pm	H8:36pm	7:58	4:10	
TUES 9 JAN	L3:27am	H8:53am	L3:54pm	H9:26pm	7:57	4:11	
WED 10 JAN	L4:21am	H9:45am	L4:47pm	H10:15pm	7:57	4:12	
THURS 11 JAN	L5:12am	H10:34am	L5:38pm	H11:02pm	7:56	4:14	NEW
FRI 12 JAN	L6:02am	H11:23am	L6:28pm	H11:48pm	7:55	4:15	
SAT 13 JAN	L6:53am	H12:10pm	L7:17pm		7:55	4:16	
SUN 14 JAN	H0:33am	L7:43am	H12:55pm	L8:04pm	7:54	4:18	
MON 15 JAN	H1:17am	L8:30am	H1:42pm	L8:47pm	7:53	4:19	
TUES 16 JAN	H2:04am	L9:15am	H2:30pm	L9:29pm	7:53	4:21	
WED 17 JAN	H2:52am	L9:59am	H3:22pm	L10:12pm	7:52	4:22	
THURS 18 JAN	H3:43am	L10:46am	H4:18pm	L11:02pm	7:51	4:24	FIRST

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

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Content Coordinator ISSUE #242 Dave Young

Art Director Jason Ellis

Section Editors

Hugh Sullivan news@

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& Kate Shaw listings@

Victoria Kingham arts@

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Fiona McGarry food@

Hugh Sullivan sport@

Dave Young business@

Sub Editors

Serena Ferrari, Fiona McGarry, Celia Partridge, Rod Webb

Contributors

Steve Peak | Robin Holtom

Have Your Say letters@

Hastings Independent Press CIC
57 Linton Road Hastings
TN34 1TN

Telephone 01424 559085

EMAIL US @hastingsindependentpress.co.uk
 @HastingsIndependentPress | @HastingsIndependent



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party that has no interest in me or my town?" Cllr Evans cited "right wing policies and rhetoric... we have been micromanaged by Westminster-centric, unelected Labour Party officials."

Within the next three days two further ex-Labour councillors – former mayor Nigel Sinden and Cllr Mike Turner – joined the Independents. Cllr Sinden said that he was doing so in order to "speak up for myself... without putting a political party's view first... I remain a Socialist but now one with the strings removed".

TURNER SPEAKS OUT

Cllr Turner was more outspoken. "My association with the Labour Party goes back to my childhood when my parents, as keen socialists, would allow their home to be used as an election committee room. As a child I ran around delivering Labour leaflets through the letterboxes, then as a young adult I joined the Labour Party. In later life I became a shop steward when I worked in the aerospace industry as a toolmaker. Wherever I moved to in the country, I stayed with the Labour Party."

"When Keir Starmer stood as leader of the Labour Party I supported him, however I'm now ashamed to admit that I did, as he endorsed the war crime of cutting off water and electricity to Palestinians in Gaza, while Labour's position to not support a ceasefire has been a complete disgrace. The sight of a young boy carrying his dead sibling through water will forever haunt me. The Labour Party has lost its moral compass, those on the Parliamentary Labour front bench should be ashamed for not supporting a ceasefire."

Anger over the national leadership's stance on Gaza was clearly one spark that has flamed the party revolt. Another was the process of selection of candidates for the upcoming local elections in May this year. In former times, Labour Party candidates were very largely determined by the local constituency party and thus by local members. This time around, according to Cllr Batsford, the process was managed entirely by the Regional Office with nobody involved at local level. As it happens – and surely not by mere coincidence – six of the eight Independents were elected in 2022 and are therefore safe in their council seats until 2026. A seventh, Cllr Roark, had already decided not to stand again. However, the eighth, deputy leader Cllr Evans, who was expecting to stand for re-election

Sarah Jones



(from L to R) Cllrs Batsford, Evans, Sinden, Cannan, Turner

in the Hollington ward in May, was de-selected, having earlier last year been refused a shortlisting as parliamentary candidate for the Hastings & Rye constituency. She alleged that there was a deliberate "blocking of people of colour from leadership positions".

NATIONAL PARTY RESPONSE

The immediate response from the national party has been wholly uncompromising. On 15 December, the day after the resignations were announced, the BBC quoted a Labour spokesperson: "With Keir Starmer as leader, the Labour Party has changed fundamentally. The fact that these councillors, all hold-outs from its previous regime, no longer feel the Labour Party is their home is conclusive proof of that."

Their performative gesture politics has driven the council to the brink of bankruptcy and, as a result, they had effectively been placed in special measures. We call upon them now to do the honourable thing and step down immediately, and allow the hardworking people of Hastings the chance to elect councillors who will put Hastings first."

At local level, neither the party's official parliamentary candidate, Helena Dollimore, nor any borough councillors who remain loyal to the national party have been willing to make any comment, though it is understood that Cllr Heather Bishop has been appointed as leader of the latter group. However, a Change.Org petition was launched by Stephen Bournier demanding that the councillors who resigned from Labour should also resign their seats and put themselves up for re-election.

Referring to the six original Independents, the petition argues that "these individuals were elected based on their commitment to uphold Labour values. Their recent resignation has raised concerns about whether they will continue

to represent these values as independent leaders and the appropriateness of their actions, given the precarious financial position of the Council and gross mismanagement of the Council's finances ... The residents of Hastings elected these representatives with trust in their declared political alignment and its associated principles. Any deviation from this can be seen as a breach of that trust. It is crucial for our democracy that elected officials remain true to their campaign promises and maintain transparency with their constituents."

GREEN INTERVENTION

Green council leader Julia Hilton, who served in Cllr Barnett's cabinet in 2022 but was then ejected when the national Labour party instructed him to end a local co-operation agreement with her party, was critical of the timing of the resignations and called for multi-party involvement in future governance of the council.

She issued a statement: "I am not surprised that half of the Labour councillors have decided to leave an increasingly autocratic Labour Party, however their timing leaves much to be desired... Creating uncertainty now, just after passing a budget which requires eye-watering savings to keep the council afloat, is highly irresponsible..."

"There are now six different political groups represented on the council [Labour, ex-Labour Independents, Conservatives, Greens, a Conservative Independent and Reform UK] and all those voices need to be heard in the important decisions that need to be made in the next two months, particularly on the budget and corporate plan. There are also huge regeneration plans being consulted on over the next three months with both the Public Realm and Green Connections project and the Station Gateway proposals currently under devel-

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

Letter

VOICELESS OVER GAZA

Dear HIP

Guy Harris wrote in HIP 240 wondering whether he is "the only constituent currently wondering where Cllr. Dollimore stands on the very pressing issue of a ceasefire in Gaza". I have now sent two emails to Helena Dollimore asking her what her position is concerning the massacre in Gaza and I have not yet received a reply.

I can only assume, since she has not spoken out against the murder of several thousand Palestinians, so very many of whom are children, and the despicable inhumane way in which the population is being forced to exist, that she condones it.

On 16 December at the Palestine Solidarity rally in Hastings town centre three ex-Labour councillors were able to join us as they have resigned and are therefore no longer gagged by the Labour Party.

It seems the Labour Party will go to any lengths to try to win an election but, in the process, it is losing the support of all who have the moral courage to speak out against wrong.

Jane Carey

from our website

TORY LANGUAGE

Cllr Barnett's language in 'Budget for Hope' in HIP 241 – "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 priority" – is the same as was typically used by Conservative councils for many years. It's disarming to hear it from a Labour-controlled authority (though, since the resignations, I'm not sure who is now in charge). The end result is inevitably a tiny so-called enabling authority which becomes virtually irrelevant to most people as it does so little.

We're practically there now, of course. The council has let standards drop for many years, and parts of the Borough look so down at heel. It's not all about money. Often it's simply about making sure something is done well. Too often the council can't even manage that.

And, all the while, the council has unwisely committed public funds to building a Premier Inn. Bankruptcy can't be far away. If we want our town to thrive, then the community will have to do more for itself. Generally we're pretty good at that.

Steve Rodrick

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.

opment. These decisions cannot be left to a group that now represents only seven [now eight] out of 32 councillors."

Cllr Batsford suggests, however, that the freeing of the Independents group from national Labour direction will lead in itself to much more open and cooperative local democracy. "This is a moment when we can open things up and make the full council transparent," he said. "It's time for national politics to be

taken out of Hastings".

A cabinet meeting scheduled to take place on Tuesday of this week was cancelled, but a full council meeting is due to be convened on 24 January. In theory Cllr Barnett could then face a vote of no confidence in his leadership and/or in the make-up of his cabinet. But it's difficult to imagine any other groups assembling the necessary numbers to offer a viable coalition alternative prior to the May elections.



COMMUNITY

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Ten Weeks That Could Shake Your World

NICK PELLING highlights the Hastings Writers Workshop

If you have ever attempted the lonely craft of writing a short story or a poem, you will know how easy it is to be defeated by self doubt and maybe even suffer from a slight sense of embarrassment. The Hastings Writers Workshop (HWW) offers a great way to overcome these bedevilling snares.

The workshops are run by James Young, a successful Irish writer who brings charisma and clear structure to the group sessions. He is a specialist in short fiction and even edits the *Short Fiction Journal*. I can personally vouch for the inspirational and



James Young

thought-provoking nature of these classes; I attended a ten-week class last year. The great thing about the course was the way, each week, we looked at a different aspect involved in creative writing, such as shifting points of view and voice and much more. In addressing these literary mechanics, we were given some quite challenging

pieces to read and analyse. The following week the group would discuss the issues arising.

AVOIDING THE IRRELEVANT

The danger with free roaming discussion is, of course, the tendency of creative types to meander off into the conversational backwoods of irrelevance. But James is particularly effective - in the most gentle and diplomatic fashion - in letting people know they should probably stick to the point, or pipe down.

He also keeps the group small in number - around eight or so - which leads to an intimate and trusting atmosphere: this is vital as each week people also receive feedback on their own creative efforts. After a while, you realise that even trenchant criticism is coming from a shared sense of creative endeavour.

This time around, HWW is offering a range of courses located in their new home in the Palace Workshop in the old Debenhams building. All the courses are ten weeks in duration. In addition to the first level course, there are further workshops for those that want to continue their explorations after the initial course and there is also an 'advanced' course.

EXCITING EXPERIMENTS

This year there are also some exciting new departures for the HWW. James says he is "very excited to announce that we will be offering two courses from the brilliant Jen Calleja, author of the verse novel *Vehicle*." 'New Perspectives on Poetry' and 'Adventures in Experimental Fiction' will begin in February. If you are interested in ways to subvert the traditional structures of literature, or if you just want to get your head around what is sometimes called meta-fiction, this could be for you. Calleja has been shortlisted for the Man Booker International prize, so HWW has pulled off quite a coup in getting this young writer to share some of her methods and outlook.

The cost of these courses is generally £190 for the ten weeks. If you are looking for a way to kick-start your creative self this year, this could be money well spent. Looking back on my experiences, I have to say that I agree with a fellow workshopper who said, "the course rapidly became the highlight of my week."

■ To find out more about the courses, go to hastingswriter-workshop.com



Dave Young

More Than a Gym

NICK PELLING & HELEN MURPHY investigate the realities of a community leisure centre.

Around this rather bloated time of year, many people begin to think about self-improvement schemes, like joining a gym. The cynical amongst us say that most people will probably go for about three weeks and then slump back on to the sofa and crack open the Pringles. We went along to Summerfields Leisure Centre, on Bohemia Road, to have a look at what is on offer and see whether there is any hope for us over-indulgent sinners. On the reception desk, we found Linda Moon, a most warm and welcoming front of house.

Linda has worked at Summerfields for 21 years. Impressively, she seems to know everyone that comes and goes. She is particularly good with young children, overburdened young mums and bouncy oldsters. As she says, "I have watched kids grow up here." It certainly seemed that lots of young mums drop in for the tumble-tots sessions and genuinely value Linda's engaging, good humoured and caring disposition. Indeed, it was noticeable that many of the staff seemed to enjoy working in such a sociable environment.

SURVIVAL OF THE AQUAFIT

Linda explained to us that there is an extraordinary amount on offer in this leisure centre. Alongside the standard gym sessions, there are so many other ways to flex the flesh. You could try Stretch and Tone, or, if you are not a gym person, you could try Aquafit in the pool, yoga or Pilates, or even more exotic sounding exertions such as Drums

Alive or Zumba. If you feel a bit more of a need to release some post-festive frustrations, you could try the Freedom Combat Class.

Almost all of these classes are run by a professional tutor. If you feel that you might be embarrassed to jump around in front of others, the centre does make it very clear that their classes are for 'all levels of fitness'. All you need to do is turn up in something comfy and bring some rehydration fluid - sometimes known as water.

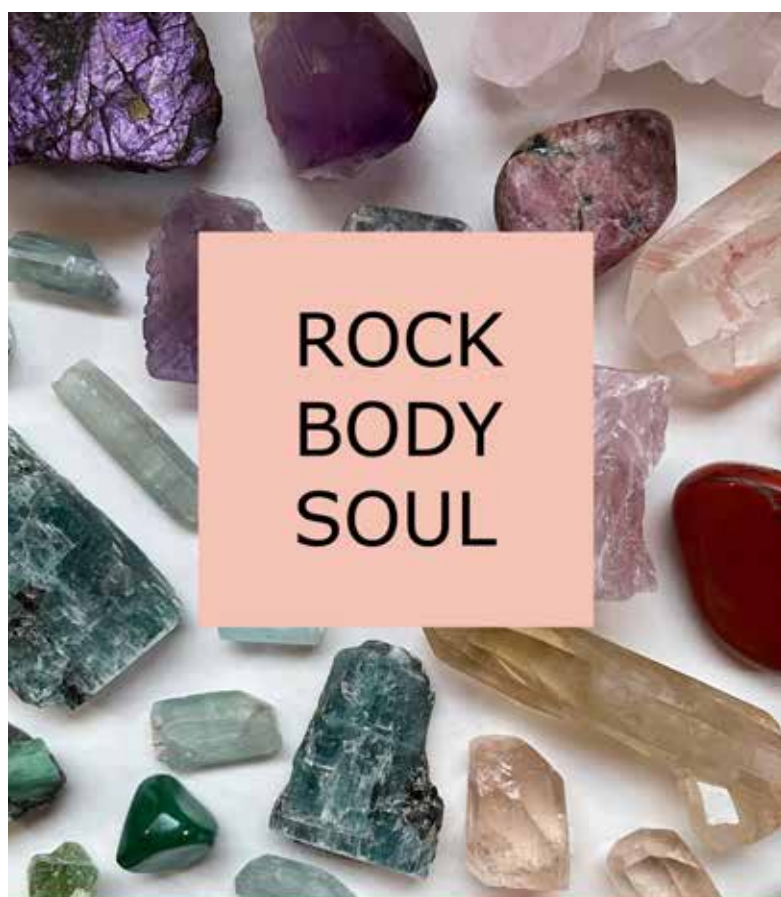
It should also be pointed out that you can enter the classes on a pay-on-the-day basis. For example, it's £7 for a single gym session or £5.50 for a swim. But there are also membership options that offer concessionary rates, including a very reasonable annual membership rate.

I decided to join the gym myself - Helen Murphy decided not to join and expressed the opinion that I would never stick to it. The gym room is perhaps best if you want to just stay in your own headspace and not have to be sociable. Personally, I don't like to perspire and turn beetroot in group gatherings: it seems I prefer - for some reason - to focus only on pedalling a stationary bicycle to nowhere.

LET'S GET (A BIT) PHYSICAL

However, for those that say all this exertion is usually futile, we beg to differ. Looking at the steady flow of people who come in and out of the foyer and listening to Linda's hellos and goodbyes, we both had the distinct sense that this place offers a social service: a kind of cross between a community drop-in and a place to just reconnect with your bodily self.

Obviously, people need self-discipline and commitment, but Summerfields is not the kind of place where iron-pumping fitness fascists seek to make everyone feel inadequate. It is more like an all-embracing arena for anyone to make a new start in a new year.



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Gifting a Noun

ROBIN HOLTOM

Over Christmas, I heard people write and speak of 'gifting' something instead of giving it. This use of language is disconcerting. It seems to emphasise the thing as opposed to the action. A verb *giving* is transformed into a noun *gift*. Language is constantly on the move, of course, but this recent tendency seems to be moving in the wrong direction. Many words are both nouns and verbs – *deal* for instance. But, unlike *dealing*, giving is an act of generosity in which the process is more important than the product, or so we like to believe. Gifting appears, therefore, to devalue the generosity in giving.

This set me thinking about nouns and verbs. Nouns seem to be stable; real; reliable; fixed. Verbs are less certain as to outcome and more organic. A gift is what it is, but giving involves some uncertainty. It may be misconstrued or disliked or warmly welcomed. That is how giving is... uncertain, exciting.

Eiffel Tower is a noun. It is a fixed entity. The verb *climbing* in relation to the Eiffel Tower is less

certain as to the outcome. One may climb for the exercise, to see the view or to throw oneself off the top of the tower. Yet the whole meaning of the Eiffel Tower is bound up with it being climbable. Verbs really imbue nouns with meaning. Without these meanings the world would be duller and, perhaps, even quite dead.

SERIAL KILLER OR SAINT

So why are we 'gifting' a verb into a noun? An essential difference between nouns and verbs is the fact that nouns are visible while verbs are not really so – or not in the same way. A person is visible, but the more interesting question of whether they are a serial killer or a saint is not. If, however, we find ourselves invisible, overlooked, we can have a deep sense of loneliness or frustration. The comforting sense that we are a thing, a noun, a proper noun even, out there and part of the 'real' world begins to dissolve. This is disturbing but it is necessary. Becoming aware of our invisibility is part of that self-examining without which, as Socrates reminded us, life is not worth living. A noun cannot examine itself.

Although we cannot stamp out nouns, it may be necessary for nouns to become less prominent if we are to prevent the overemphasis on visibility and begin to explore the life worth living. Our difficulty is complicated by the way that social media enable almost every aspect of our lives to be made visible and shared with others. People are posting on their social media sites any number of subjects from food to pets, to political opinions.

Post is another of those words which are both a verb and a noun. A post appears to be a noun, a thing, but it is really a trace of the network of verbs and communications it is part of. The selection of smiling faces at the meal posted on Facebook do not, however, include the less photogenic pictures taken a few moments earlier that have been deleted on the mobile phone. The price we pay for the noun of our carefully curated visible image is recognising that it is really a fiction.

INVISIBILITY CLOAK

We really are invisible, and this is not a particularly comforting thought. We know very well that appearances are deceptive, but recognising our invisibility and the invisibility of others is a lone-

ly path. Older people or (even more so) disabled people often complain of becoming invisible. The compulsive visibility of contemporary life has become an elaborate compensation for the troubling recognition that we are really invisible and the unpredictable insights this understanding can bring.

In *Angels Fear*, the anthropologist, Gregory Bateson offers us a way through these confusions: "If we want to be able to talk about the living world (and ourselves) we need to master the disciplines of description and reference in this curious language that has no things in it but only differences and relationships. Only if we do so will we be able to think sensibly about the matrix in which we live, and only then will we recognise our affinity with the rest of the world and deal with it ethically and responsibly. Not only do we misread and mistreat meadows, oceans and organisms of all kinds, but our mistreatments of each other are based on errors of the general order of not knowing what we are dealing with, or acting in ways which violate the communicative web."

Making verbs into nouns is one way the communicative web becomes violated. The World Wide Web has created a sense of connect-

edness, but we are not really addressing the attitude of mind needed to engage fully with the task of resisting idle-minded exploitation of the technology. Student research, for example, is full of cut-and-paste essays with no real understanding of the context and evolution of the ideas being bandied around. And we should remember that ideas are as important here as weapons in a war zone. If ideas are bundled up and lobbed at people without regard to how they will be received or understood, then the scene is set for real weapons to be used instead.

EMPLOYED BY IMPERIAL GOVERNMENTS

The Sykes-Picot Agreement is a cautionary tale. Lines were drawn on maps by civil servants employed by Imperial governments in London and Paris towards the end of the First World War in order to invent new boundaries in the Middle East when the fighting stopped. New 'proper nouns' came to be invented such as Iraq and Iran and eventually Israel. The lines had little regard to the communicative network of tribes and religions and nations already there. They are, consequently, at least partly, responsible for the deadly conflicts in the region that have become so familiar 100 years later.



FEATURES

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Hastings Fishermen's Museum



The History of the Hastings Fishermen's Museum

STEVE PEAK

The Hastings Fishermen's Museum was built in 1853/4 as a church, which closed in 1939 and was converted into the Fishermen's Museum in 1956.

Until the early 1830s there was no ground where the Museum stands today, because the sea was coming up to the foot of the cliffs. In late 1834, in order to protect both the cliffs and the Old Town from increasing invasions by the sea, Hastings Council built a wooden groyne where the east side of the Shipwreck Museum is today.

Groynes are barriers built across a beach to stop the movement of shingle along the coast, and a large amount of shingle immediately built up on the west side of the 1834 groyne, creating a new piece of 'ground' in front of the cliffs.

On this new land, the fishermen wanted to build sheds in which to store their fishing gear, but there were so many boat-owners seeking a space that Hastings Council had to lay out the ground in rows of plots of about eight or nine feet square. Because of the small size of these plots, the sheds that the fishermen built - known as the 'net

shops' - had to be tall and thin, making their combination of layout and design unique to Hastings.

In 1843 another groyne was built, adding to the amount of new land available to the fishing fleet and providing space for other uses including boat-building, an ironworks and eventually a church. In March 1853, the Diocese of Chichester enlisted a well-known Old Town scripture reader, Tom Tanner, to persuade the debaucherous fishermen to come to either the nearby churches of All Saints or St Clements. But he was unsuccessful, and it was quickly decided that



the problem was so serious that what was needed was a 'chapel of ease' on the beach where the fishermen actually worked. The feeling was: if they won't come to the church, take the church to them!

LAYING THE STONE

The foundation stone of the new

Fishermen's Church of St Nicholas - patron saint of sailors - was laid in August 1853. Seven months later, the church opened for worship with the Reverend Tanner as its first chaplain.

It is believed that the church was never actually consecrated and was regarded as a mission church. The Crown granted a 75-year lease of the ground, which Hastings Council took over when it expired, and it remains the landlord of the building today. There was seating for 290 people. The popular Tom Tanner - 'The Rev Tom', as he was known - remained chaplain until his death in 1880, by which time he had won over the fishermen to accept the presence of the church. Among its visiting preachers was the famous author Charles Kingsley, in 1857.

The Rev Tom's successors as chaplain were the Rev Charles Dawes from 1880-86, the former master mariner Molesworth Edwards from 1886-1894, and the Rev Herbert Sanders from 1894-1916, a certificated seaman. Sanders



All Photos: Petra Gent unless otherwise specified



Hastings Fishermen's Museum



started the annual Blessing of the Sea, which still takes place today.

From 1916 laymen instead of clergy continued the work of the mission church, but soon after the Second World War broke out, in September 1939, The Fishermen's Church was requisitioned by the military to be used as a store. It

was then leased to Butlers Emporium hardware shop in George Street in 1947.

THE FOUNDING OF OHPS

In late 1952, local residents who saw the major changes and demolitions of traditional buildings in the Old Town as damaging to the

area's character, set up the Old Hastings Preservation Society (OHPS) and started several campaigns; one of which was to save one of the last two surviving Hastings sailing luggers. The failure to salvage one of them - the *Industry* RX 94 which was burnt on Bonfire Night 1953 - prompted special efforts to save the other lugger, the *Enterprise* RX278, built in Hastings in 1912. The OHPS and fishermen proposed to the Council that the *Enterprise* should be housed in the new fishmarket, which was about to be built amongst the net shops. But this was refused.

So then the OHPS suggested that the near-derelict Fishermen's Church should become a museum of the local fishing industry, with the *Enterprise* inside it. This idea received much support from the fishing community, which was feeling hostile to the town hall over many issues, not least the degradation of what they regarded as *their* church. In July 1955, the remorseful Council gave the

scheme the go-ahead, agreeing to pay much of the cost of restoring the building, and saying that the museum would not have to pay any rent or rates.

THE MUSEUM OPENS

Butlers moved their stores out in March 1956 and on 17 April part of the church's south wall was demolished and the *Enterprise* was hauled inside. The interior of the building was in such a bad state that it had to be almost gutted. But, nonetheless, it was quickly restored and many exhibits were put on display, including the last wooden horse capstan (still in the Museum today). The Fishermen's Museum was officially inaugurated on Thursday 17 May 1956, when the mayor, Alderman Frederick Hussey, stood on the deck of the *Enterprise* and declared it open.

The OHPS set up a committee of fishermen and some OHPS representatives to actually run the Museum. The committee's director

was Admiral Hubert Dannreuther, president of the OHPS, who had been a leading figure in the setting up of the OHPS and was regarded as being the Museum's founder. The committee also took on the role of restoring the 43 net shops that were still standing, a role the Museum played into the 1980s.

When Admiral Dannreuther died in 1977 he was succeeded as director by John Burton, a retired senior Hastings Council officer and in 1992, when Mr Burton was 85, Council representatives said they wanted to commercialise the Museum by removing the *Enterprise* and installing the latest electronic gadgets. But Mr Burton and local historian Steve Peak, author of this history, together launched a successful campaign to keep the Museum as it was then, and still is today.

■ *The Fishermen's Museum is open every day, admission free. More history details on hastingshistory.net*



What a Hoot!



For those of you who missed the HIP Hootenanny, the night was a special success. Not only did we raise funds for our community newspaper, but the energy in the room was vibrant and electric. The pictures hardly do it justice. Our 'Special Guest' compere was comedian Henning Vehn, who masterfully and hilariously conducted the time between acts as well as the raffle which included a highly desirable voucher and lots of alcohol. The entertainment never stopped, and the evening ended on a final note of spontaneous willing (and unwilling) dancing

sparked by the final act, Sister Suzie. A special shoutout to Food Comes First and Helen Groves for the catering, Janine and Peter at the Crown House, Henning Vehn, Mike Willis, and all the talent - Mike Hatchard, Max Bailey, Leo Wyndham, Danny Horn, The Lost Revellers and Sister Suzie. And of course, the warmest thank you to all of you who braved the December weather to attend the HIP Hootenanny. It's because of your generous support that the Hastings Independent can continue to provide free journalism to the community. Do look out for our next event!