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## BARNETT'S BLUE MONDAY TURNS GREEN



**HUGH SULLIVAN  
AND PAUL MCLAUGHLIN**

The third Monday of January has come to be coined as Blue Monday – the most depressing day of the year in the UK measured in terms of dull weather, financial pressures and post-holiday ennui.

Paul Barnett's apparent resignation this Monday (15 January) as leader of Hastings Borough Council certainly won't have made it a

cheerful day for him and his group of former Labour councillors now styling themselves as Hastings Independents (no relation to this newspaper). But for new Council leader designate Julia Hilton, elected as the only Green on the council less than three years ago, it's a remarkable rise in status.

On 13 December six councillors, including council leader Paul Barnett and five of his cabinet colleagues, resigned from the Labour

party to form a new Hastings Independents group. Within five days they were joined by two other former Labour councillors. The group was immediately censured by each of the other multiple party groupings within the council – Conservatives, Greens and the rump of Labour members – for the timing of the resignations, which were announced just after a cost-cutting budget had been voted through and in the aftermath of a highly critical

external audit of the council's financial management.

Nothing further was said, nor action taken, over the Christmas and New Year holiday period, during which Cllr Barnett is understood to have absented himself from the town. But on Tuesday 9 January it emerged that five loyalist Labour members, led by deputy mayor Heather Bishop, were

**Continued on page2>**



**7** RENTAL NIGHTMARE



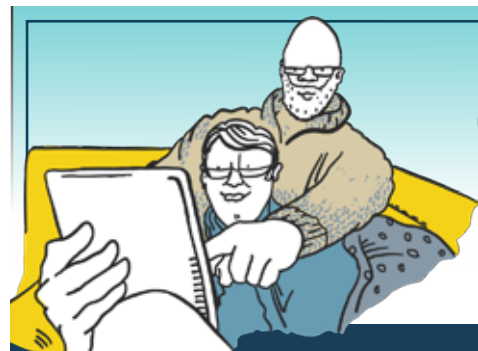
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NEWS

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

2024 promises to be the Year of Politics. Internationally, the fall-out from the Israel-Gaza conflict threatens the stability of the region. Nationally we are expecting a General Election, with the Conservatives, according to the polls, in virtual meltdown. Locally, as our lead news story reports, the immediate future of Hastings Borough Council seems opaque as the various groups form coalitions in order to achieve a working majority. And that's not to mention the extraordinary prospect of a convicted criminal being elected to the White House, where he could quite possibly issue himself with a presidential pardon. The first three of these topics are well covered in the News and Opinion pages of this issue. And it surely can't be long before someone offers us their views on Mr Trump. Which is a roundabout way of saying don't be shy. We welcome articles and letters from any and all of our readers.

Not straying far from politics, both the News and the Community pages highlight the problems of local housing and look at the very real personal consequences of its shortage

But there is plenty else in HIP to tempt you. Stories of how the Hastings Contemporary is reaching out to the people (P6) and news of this year's not-quite-so-Fat Tuesday (P4 of Listings). And, of course, there is our usual coverage of arts and literature to sooth the spirits and stimulate the grey cells.

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calling for an emergency full council meeting to be held this Wednesday (17 January). The meeting was to debate and vote upon a motion of no confidence in Cllr Barnett as council leader, in Cllr Maya Evans as deputy leader, and in the rest of the cabinet (from which the remaining Labour loyalist Judy Rogers had already resigned). If that motion was carried, the full council was to hold a further vote to appoint a new leader.

The combined voting strength of the ten Conservatives and five Labour loyalists would be just short of a majority of the 32 councillors in the chamber. However the Independents were unlikely to be able to rely upon the votes of all five Green members plus four other apparently unaligned councillors. These included Cllr Sabina Arthur, currently suspended from the Labour party but not (it would seem) prepared to vote against it, and Cllr Alan Roberts, who is ill and was not expected to attend. In case the numbers were tied, the mayor Cllr Margi O'Callaghan, who is another Labour loyalist, would have a casting vote.

The Independents will surely have studied these mathematics and concluded that they could not avoid defeat if the vote were held. The more salient question was therefore what alternative leadership and cabinet portfolio allocation might attract a majority.

According to reports received by HIP, an online meeting was hastily convened at 5pm on Monday evening between all four party leaders – Cllr Barnett for the Independents, Cllr Andy Patmore for the



Julia Hilton pictured on her first election as councillor, May 2021

Conservatives, Cllr Hilton for the Greens and Cllr Bishop for Labour.

At the meeting Cllr Barnett indicated his intention to resign as leader, so negating the need for the motion of no confidence. He also confirmed that Cllr Evans was willing to step down as deputy leader; and likewise his Independent cabinet colleagues - Andy Batsford (Culture), John Cannan (Charity Committee Chair), Ali Roark (Environment) and Simon Willis (Housing and Community Development) - would resign their portfolios.

With the tacit support of both Cllrs Patmore and Bishop, it was agreed that Cllr Hilton should become Council Leader, also taking on the Natural Environment portfolio. She is expected to be joined in cabinet by two party colleagues, Glenn Haffenden (Urban Environment) and Claire Carr (Culture).

The Independent group is believed to have accepted three cabinet portfolios: Paul Barnett (Deputy Leader of the Council and Finance); John Cannan (Charity

Committee Chair and sole trustee of the Foreshore Trust); and Simon Willis (Housing and Community Development). Cllrs Evans and Batsford would both depart from the Cabinet.

As HIP went to press, these proposed new arrangements remained dependent on the respective approvals of the Conservative and Labour groups, with both Cllr Patmore and Cllr Bishop still to address party colleagues on the details of the deal. However, the political difficulties of Conservatives agreeing the appointment of a minority Labour leader, or vice versa, don't seem to allow any alternative option.

Cllr Hilton made her co-operative pitch in advance - that all four parties "could use this short period before the local elections in May to come together to form a new way of working – a rainbow cabinet where all parties have equal power and responsibility in the best interest of the town". Time will tell how effective this will be in action.

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DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES			SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 19 JAN	H4:04am	L11:24am	H5:21pm	7:50	4:26	
SAT 20 JAN	L0:03am	H5:43am	L12:47pm	H6:30pm	7:49	4:27
SUN 21 JAN	L1:13am	H6:58am	L2:01pm	H7:48pm	7:48	4:29
MON 22 JAN	L2:31am	H8:13am	L3:16pm	H8:58pm	7:47	4:31
TUES 23 JAN	L3:42am	H9:19am	L4:20pm	H9:53pm	7:46	4:32
WED 24 JAN	L4:39am	H10:13am	L7:12pm	H10:38pm	7:45	4:34
THURS 25 JAN	L5:27am	H10:57am	L5:55pm	H11:17pm	7:44	4:36
FRI 26 JAN	L6:07am	H11:35am	L6:31pm	H11:53pm	7:42	4:37
SAT 27 JAN	L6:43am	H12:10pm	L7:01pm		7:41	4:39
SUN 28 JAN	H0:27am	L7:16am	H12:43pm	L7:27pm	7:40	4:41
MON 29 JAN	H1:01am	L7:46am	H1:15pm	L7:55pm	7:38	4:43
TUES 30 JAN	H1:32am	L8:19am	H1:44pm	L8:25pm	7:37	4:44
WED 31 JAN	H2:01am	L8:51am	H2:12pm	L8:57pm	7:36	4:46
THURS 1 FEB	H2:28am	L9:24am	H2:42pm	L9:29pm	7:34	4:48

\* L = LOW TIDE H = HIGHTIDE For beach safety advice visit: [mli.org/safety/beach-safety](https://mli.org/safety/beach-safety)

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# What's to be Done About Housing?

HUGH SULLIVAN

The economics of the housing crisis in Hastings are easy to summarise: too much demand, not enough supply. The result: a rise in house prices, currently curtailed by the increase in interest rates, but set to continue upwards if these rates are not maintained; a huge rise in rent levels, still going up; and a huge increase in the number of people who can't afford them and are forced to present themselves as homeless to the council.

It's a relatively new problem for Hastings. The town has experienced higher comparative house price inflation over the last ten years than any other English local authority area, according to Chris Hancock,

Head of Housing at Hastings Borough Council. But that was from a very low base. Up to four years ago the town was still accommodating homeless public sector tenants as spillovers from other local authority areas in the south-east which were under greater pressure.

In March 2019 there were 146 households in temporary accommodation in the borough; by September this year, that number had risen to 525.

At the same time there's been no increase in the overall residential population. On the contrary, according to figures issued by the ONS (the Office of National Statistics), the population of the borough has decreased by between 300 and 400 in each of the last four years, making a net aggregate reduction between 2018 and 2022 of 1,341.

## HOUSEHOLD MULTIPLICATION

So why the increase in demand? There's a reduction in the size of average households, so the overall fall in population masks a rise in units of separate demand. Family breakdowns also multiply household numbers, often making two

units where there used to be one. Then there's the shift in working patterns which has increased the ability of white collar workers, whether employed or self-employed, to work longer hours at home or at any rate out of office. DFLs (down from Londoners), typically in the creative sector, can enjoy the amenities of a coastal town while retaining their spending power fuelled by London-size earnings.

On the other hand, local incomes have not kept pace. More particularly for the high proportion of people who are unemployed, underemployed or retired, benefit levels have trailed far behind.

The rise in Local Housing Allowances – the amounts of benefit geared to rent subsidy – announced by the Chancellor of Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt, in his Autumn Statement last November should assist claimants considerably. The LHA level will be restored, he said, "to the 30th percentile of local market rents". That means that, from this April onwards, the housing element of universal credit should be raised to cover the full rent charged for three out of ten units offered for

private rental.

However, the supply side remains highly problematic. Hastings has a high proportion of homes in the private rented sector (29% compared to a Southeast England average of 19%) – a legacy of its history as a tourist destination. Much of this housing stock is in older properties with many flats in converted Victorian buildings. The costs of maintaining standards and achieving regulatory compliance are pushing landlords either to remove themselves from the market, raise rents or move to different business models.

## AIRBNB

One of those models is of course AirBnB. At the beginning of September there were 923 active rentals across Hastings and Bexhill (the large majority within the borough of Hastings), most of them two-bedroom properties. Hancock is reluctant to point the finger at this factor in the market: it is council policy to encourage tourism, and the low number of hotel and other visitor lodgings in Hastings and St Leonards is frequently compared unfavourably with East-

bourne and other south coast towns. But it's clear that a significant proportion of property is shifting to shorter term rentals that bring potentially higher returns with reduced tax liabilities.

Another factor influencing rental patterns is the longstanding proposal, adopted in theory by all the mainstream political parties, to abolish no-fault evictions under section 21 of the Housing Act 1988. The Conservative government, under successive prime ministers, has dangled this legislative change before parliament only to withdraw it. Labour have accused them of being bought off by landlord interests. But such a change in property rights could hardly be enforced retrospectively. The likely result of introducing the measure for future tenancies would be to provoke a wholesale exit from the sector of a significant proportion of landlords: that's not going to help the supply shortage.

No wonder, then, that more radical solutions are looked for. Grace Lally puts the case for Housing Rebellion below. HIP aims to publish further viewpoints in the coming weeks.

# Housing Rebellion in Hastings

**Writer Grace Lally is a member of Housing Rebellion, a direct action group of housing and climate activists**

We are told – across the nation but particularly in Hastings – that we must choose between providing urgently needed homes and protecting our green spaces. This is an entirely false choice.

The solutions to the environmental and housing crises are actually one and the same: tackling the powerful vested interests of the property industry, which are putting their private gain ahead of the social good.

There are a million empty homes in the UK, so the environmental cost of new construction (currently 10% of carbon emissions) is unjustifiable. The 'problem of supply' is really a problem of hoarding and profiteering. Hundreds of homes in Hastings are unavailable for long term rent because they are more profitable as holiday lets. Hundreds of properties sit empty because the market will see them magically rise in value even while they fall into disrepair. Wealthy people keep sec-

ond homes here, simply because they can.

The environmental cost of heating and lighting our homes (currently 30% of carbon emissions) could be cut dramatically if every house had proper insulation, heat pumps and solar panels. That would also dramatically improve the quality of our homes and reduce energy bills. But still property developers are under no obligation to meet high environmental standards, and private tenants are terrified to ask for these improvements, even when plagued by damp and mould, because there are no limits to how much their landlord could then raise their rent.

Reducing environmental and planning restrictions on developers doesn't bring down house prices. The cost of housing is mostly linked to the cost of finance, and we have seen how governments use every financial tool at their disposal – from reducing stamp duty to underwriting mortgages for new builds through schemes like 'help to buy' – to try to ensure that house prices NEVER fall. The same governments that say we



must control inflation by controlling wages say we can never control rents.

The politicians who pay lip service to the housing crisis (and sometimes even pretend to understand the catastrophic environmental challenges we are facing) are primarily only concerned with propping up an economic system that relies on never-ending economic growth – of which construction is a key part – and a financial system that is dangerously reliant on property values.

Housing Associations which could be spearheading the transition to sustainable homes in Hast-

ings have instead been compared to slum landlords.

But fortunately people with secure housing association tenancies have a lot more power than tenants of private landlords and by organising collectively they can use tactics like rent strikes to force change. ACORN, the community union, and Unite Community, have begun working with Southern Housing tenants in Hollington to campaign against longstanding problems with damp, mould and disrepair. This can happen everywhere.

Orbit, the other major housing association in Hastings, has emptied Clifton Court, a block of over

50 flats, and is planning to demolish it. They claim a new development would be more energy efficient, but the environmental cost of rebuilding is always vastly higher than refurbishment.

The real rationale for demolition is usually to unlock the land value by rebuilding on the site at a higher density and flogging off a large proportion at market rate. But why should we accept that public land, and homes that were built with public money and repaid many times over by generations of rent payers, should now be flogged off bit by bit to sustain an ever-dwindling number of affordable social homes? We need to use direct action to expose and oppose these plans, whether that means bringing these flats back into use ourselves or physically blocking any attempts to demolish them.

Members of Housing Rebellion recently affixed posters to a house in St Leonards asking "Why is this home empty?". Some neighbours removed them, saying they feared they might be an "invitation to squatters". But if a few posters could put people without a home into a home without people, then I'd say that would be a job well done. Or owners might be encouraged to lease more properties to the council for any of the hundreds of families languishing in unsuitable temporary accommodation.





## NEWS

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# Staying in the Borough

## Town sports clubs' move to Claremont School "won't proceed"

HUGH SULLIVAN

The plan to relocate the town's prime cricket and hockey clubs from Horntye Park to Claremont School appears to have been shelved. Two separate sites, both located within the borough of Hastings, have been identified as potential destinations where the requisite facilities could be developed instead – one for the cricketers of Hastings & St Leonards Priory, the other for South Saxons Hockey Club. Both sites would also be made available for wide community use.

Planning permission was granted by Rother District Council in June 2021 for extensive expansion and upgrading of sports facilities at the school in order to accommodate relocation of both clubs under an intended 50-year 'community use' agreement. And, after a series of obstructions and plan modifications, a revised application was finally lodged last November with Hastings Borough Council (HBC) by the Hastings and Rother Sports Trust, owner of the Horntye Park complex, for the redevelopment of the cricket arena as a housing estate to finance the combined move.

But Peter Finch, chairman of Horntye Park Management Company, which is the sole trustee of the Trust, has revealed that, shortly before Christmas, the school expressed "reservations" about the proposed scheme. Now, following further exchanges of correspondence and meetings between the parties, it has been

mutually agreed between the school and the Trust that it "won't proceed".

In July 2022, when HIP reported on doubts as to whether an earlier version of the planning application to redevelop Horntye would be granted, it was asserted on behalf of the Trust that: "HBC's Leisure Manager has accepted that there are no other sites available in the borough where such facilities could be delivered either now or in the foreseeable future."

However Finch says that this was on the basis that the cricket and hockey clubs should be accommodated together, as they were at Horntye. On considering the respective needs of each sport separately, two potential sites have now been identified.

He remains coy about naming either of these but says that Trust's proposals are "under discussion with, and subject to the approval of, Hastings Borough Council and an education provider".

Finch further explains: "If the proposals are accepted, after a due diligence investigation has been completed, and the necessary planning permissions granted – including for redevelopment of the Horntye cricket arena the end result could provide a refurbished Horntye Park pavilion plus the first full size 3G football pitch in Hastings, constructed on the same footprint as the dilapidated 23-year astroturf pitch on which South Saxons currently play."

For further argument put forward on behalf of the Trust, see Peter Finch's adjacent column.



Dave Young

The pavilion at Horntye Park is to be retained

## Facing the Financial Facts

**PETER FINCH, Chairman of Horntye Park Management Company which acts as sole Trustee of Hastings and Rother Sports Trust, explains how sale of the cricket arena at Horntye will benefit sport in Hastings**

The Directors of the Trust's Management Board are very conscious that there is a great deal of misinformation and misconception circulating in respect of the proposed redevelopment of part of the Horntye Park sports complex site in Bohemia Road, in the event of the planning application submitted to Hastings Borough Council before Christmas being granted.

The Board wishes to explain the current position in respect of the Trust's ambitions and aims which, should they reach fruition, will guarantee the stability and future of cricket, hockey and the numerous indoor sports, recreational, social and event activities that the Trust provides facilities for. This includes the international chess congress and all the local and government elections counts.

When the Central Cricket Ground in Hastings town centre was relocated to Horntye Park in 1998, there was much anticipated excitement about the future of the new facilities, which included a floodlit sand-dressed hockey pitch, a sports hall, numerous social and

recreational indoor facilities, and a new purpose-built County Cricket Ground. Unfortunately, Sussex County Cricket Club did not embrace the new ground or agree to use it, despite providing verbal and written input in terms of what they considered were the requirements of the new facility.

The new ground did provide an excellent venue for Hastings and St Leonards Priory Cricket Club and South Saxons Hockey Club, but use by these clubs could not produce sufficient revenue to service the costs of a high standard cricket ground. This caused the Trust to continually lose money each year, despite acting on numerous occasions to reduce costs.

### BULVERHYTHE

Several years ago, a plan was created for the Trust, acting together with Hastings United Football Club, to create a new football, cricket, hockey and indoor sports complex at Bulverhythe Recreation Ground. A developer was found and a multi-million pound sports facility planned. After considerable monies being spent to design the scheme, it was abandoned due to the housebuilder withdrawing support. The football club then planned to relocate without the Trust's involvement.

The Trust resolved to retain the sports hall and pavilion while selling the outdoor area of Horntye Park for development, relocating the cricket and hockey facilities elsewhere, preferably together. The money from such a sale would provide new sports facilities and produce the funds required to carry out essential repairs and improvements to the retained building.

Numerous enquiries were made

to locate suitable sites, which included local schools such as Ark Academy (two sites) and St Leonards Academy, but the intention of locating the cricket and hockey facilities together proved impossible to fulfil, due mainly to the amount of land required and the intrusion into the schools' other various facilities.

### CLAREMONT

Eventually, only Claremont School, off the A21 road at Ebdens Hill, was identified as having enough land and being prepared to accommodate the new facilities on a 50-year Community Use Agreement basis. Negotiations took place and agreement was reached for the Trust to invest sufficient money to build the new cricket and hockey facilities at the school. Planning permission was granted by Rother District Council in July 2021, and a reluctant approval given by Sport England, which had expressed concern that the facilities were to be moved (just) out of the Borough.

Now that won't need to happen. At the newly proposed relocation sites, a new floodlit sand-dressed hockey pitch, a grass football pitch and a full size county league cricket ground can be built. Both facilities would be serviced by purpose-designed new changing pavilions. Across the three sites, including Horntye Park, an overall increase in sports facilities would be achieved for Hastings and St. Leonards.

Should the idea have overall approval, the Trust believes that it will secure the future of the town's principal cricket and hockey clubs, provide a new floodlit full-size 3G pitch, and continue to provide high quality indoor facilities for the more than 40 groups, clubs and societies that currently use Horntye Park.

On the other hand, without the Trust's plans coming to fruition, there is a distinct possibility that the whole of the Horntye Park sports complex will be forced to close.

The planning application currently under consideration has, since the decision not to proceed with Claremont School, been amended to reflect the new proposals of relocating the cricket and hockey facilities to sites within Hastings, making them more accessible to the residents.

The development plan for Horntye Park will also now provide for the retention of all woodland and ecological areas in order to protect and enhance the wildlife and fauna habitats and to ensure survival and regeneration.

## SITE NOTICE FOR APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

This notice is to advise that on the **10th day of January 2024** an application for the grant of a variation of a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as: **Bella Wine Bar, 44-45 George Street, Hastings, TN34 3EA**

Was made by: **Ali Altimis**

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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 10th day of January 2024





# Holocaust Memorial: My Mother's Story

DAVID TASKER

Saturday 27 January is International Holocaust Memorial Day. I am putting together a commemoration service at the White Rock Theatre in Hastings. The centrepiece of the service will be a miraculous story of survival.

My 90-year-old mother, who now lives with me and my wife in Pett Level, was born as Emma Van Dam in the town of Apeldoorn, Holland in 1933. Her parents, both Jews, ran a bakery and kosher lunchroom catering for the Jewish community of the town. By 1940, when the German army invaded, three younger brothers had been born – so there were four children of the family, all under the age of eight. For the next five years, they and their parents experienced at first hand the horrors of the Nazi regime in Holland, under which Jews were first discriminated against, pilloried and robbed, then within two years found them-

selves subject to deportation en masse to death camps in Germany and Eastern Europe.

In total, 105,000 of the 140,000 Jews living in the Netherlands at the start of the war were murdered, including about 90 of Emma's relatives – her maternal grandparents, several uncles, aunts, and cousins. In Apeldoorn, a town of 80,000 people at the start of the Nazi occupation, 1,549 were registered as Jews. Of those just 150 returned alive at the end of the war, either from the camps or, like Emma and her immediate family, because they had managed to hide successfully for the duration.

In September 1940, an edict was issued to the effect that anybody who was fully or partly of Jewish blood was henceforth prohibited from being employed in any position in the civil service or at public or private schools, save those attended only by Jewish students.

On 10 January 1941, the registration was ordered of all Dutch



Emma and her family - miraculous survivors

Jews, including all those who had just one Jewish grandparent.

In July 1941, all Jewish documents had to be marked with the letter 'J'. Over the following months, measures were introduced which limited Jewish movement by either private or public transport. Even bicycles had to be turned in. A curfew was instated, and Jews could only do their shopping between certain designated hours. Jews were banned from having a telephone and from entering the homes of non-Jews.

During this period, Emma's father was imprisoned for the trivial misdemeanour of opening the bakery outside permitted hours. The lunchroom had to close. Through a combination of the efforts of the Dutch resistance movement and local police, he was released not long afterwards. But the family were now in great danger. Emma's youngest brother Max, not yet two, was handed over to the care of a Christian family.

From 3 May 1942, the Nazis obliged all Jews over the age of six to wear a badge on their clothes: a six-pointed yellow Star of David with the word 'Jew' in the middle.

The summer of 1942 saw the beginning of mass deportations of Jews to a transit camp at Westerbork, from where they would be sent regularly to Auschwitz, Sobibor and other death camps. Usually on arrival they would be herded straight into the gas chambers.

The only chance for most Dutch Jews to survive the war was to go into hiding. Unlike the Frank family, whose tragic experience was famously diarised by Anne, four years older than Emma, the Van Dams felt that their best chance

was to find separate hiding places apart from each other.

Initially, Emma was sent with one of her brothers, Simon, to live with the family of a gamekeeper. Another brother, Freddy, stayed with another family nearby.

But bounty hunters roamed the Netherlands during the German occupation. They were paid five Guilders by the authorities for every Jew they brought in, the equivalent of a week's pay for unskilled labourers. One day, two of these men appeared at the door. The gamekeeper's wife told them that Emma and Simon were her sister's children.

A couple of days later, the men came back; this time the children had to hide in the bedroom. The home of the gamekeeper was clearly no longer safe. They were taken first by bicycle and then by train to Rotterdam.

On arrival, Emma and Simon were separated from each other and sent to stay with different families. Emma stayed with a butcher who was married with five young boys. She remembers the regular bombing of the allies and constantly being hungry. The population was subjected to a food embargo by the Nazis, forcing them to live on rations of 400-800 calories per day. As a result, people resorted to eating grass and tulip bulbs to survive.

When the war finally ended, Emma remembers joining other children to run after a group of women wearing headscarves to cover the fact that they'd had their heads shaved in ritual humiliation as collaborators. She also remembers food parcels being dropped from the sky.

But best of all, she remembers being told that she was finally going home. She was first reunited with her brother Simon, who had been hiding with a greengrocer's family nearby. Another brother was eventually found after putting an advert in a newspaper. At Apeldoorn, her father was waiting for the children to arrive. Her mother had gone to Leeuwarden to look for her parents, sisters, aunts, and uncles. Unbelievably for her, they had all been murdered.

After the family had been reunited, Emma's father worked briefly as a cook for a captain in the Canadian army, stationed in Apeldoorn, but they then moved to Leeuwarden, where they took over the business which her mother's murdered relatives had run before the occupation.

In 1954, at the age of 21, Emma emigrated to Israel, where she met and married my father, who was from Liverpool. He returned with my mother to England, where I and my two brothers were born.

I have a photograph, taken at the 60th birthday of my Dutch cousin, Mary Ann, the eldest child of Emma's brother. It includes 15 people who are alive because Emma and her brothers survived the war. There are another nine family survivors not in the photo – so that's 24 people who are living now because Emma and her brothers survived the Holocaust. That's the miracle which I wish to share with the people of Hastings on this day.

■ People wishing to attend the service on 27 January should check the following link: <https://www.hastings.gov.uk/news/latest/hmd-2024/>

## Long Waits For NHS Patients in East Sussex

The proportion of patients having to wait more than four hours in A&E departments in both the Conquest Hospital in Hastings and Eastbourne District General Hospital before being treated has fallen slightly over the past year – from 35% to 32%. That's according to a statistical survey compiled by the BBC which it released publicly earlier this month. The figures are combined for the two hospitals as they are administered in tandem within the East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust. The national average is 30%.

Over the same period, the proportion of patients within the East Sussex area waiting more than 18 weeks for routine treatments has risen from 45% to 48%, as against a national average of 42%.

An East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust spokesperson said

last week:

"In common with the NHS across the country, and following the Christmas period and recent industrial action by junior doctors, we are continuing to see high levels of demand for our services, including high numbers of people needing care in our emergency departments and admission into our busy hospitals. Capacity issues in social care mean that it can be difficult for us to discharge patients who are medically ready to go home and free up hospital beds for patients who are waiting to be admitted onto a ward.

"Despite these pressures, our staff and our partners are continuing to work hard to improve waiting times in our emergency departments (including ambulance handover times) and improve our discharges home from hospital".





## COMMUNITY

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

## A Pearl for the People?

**HELEN MURPHY & NICK PELLING**  
ask what the Hastings Contemporary is doing for the people of Hastings.

The shiny black box of the Hastings Contemporary that graces The Stade in Old Town might be beautifully designed, but does it actually provide much for the people of this town? We went along to meet the Director of Programmes, Leah Cross, to ask the pressing Pythonian question: what has the Hastings Contemporary ever done for us? Leah is a charismatic and persuasive young woman who exudes a sense of mission. She informed us that the gallery is determined to offer something for “all age groups” for the town, within what they call the ‘Pearls of the Sea’ programme. This diverse programme is a constantly evolving portfolio of playful activity sessions, art classes and creative workshops. It should be stressed that the workshops are often led by local artists; indeed the gallery is very keen to build up its list of local artists who might like to offer their skills.

### A FISHY WORLD

Given the location of the gallery, among the black fishing huts, it's perhaps not surprising that the

various workshops on offer have been given fishy names. The sessions on the second Wednesday of every month, for example, are for the so-called ‘sprats’. These are for babies, up to 18 months, which seek to help the little ones explore their sensory responses. Parents are shrewdly warned that, “It could get messy.” The very attempt to regard babies as proto-artists seemed quite something to us.

Toddlers, up to four years, have their own one-hour session on the second Saturday of every month. Leah relished the fact that toddler artists can be quite anarchic; the gallery is very happy to allow mess and chaos to accompany creativity. Indeed, Leah told us about a particular episode of toddler mayhem - it involved the slow destruction of a cardboard submarine - with a big smile on her face.

There are also classes for 5-10 year-olds known as ‘brill’, and one for young artists aged 11-16. Perhaps sensibly, the teenagers - given their propensity for disapproval of all adult ideas - are not given a fishy name.

### FINDING THE FREE SPIRIT

A key aspect of the gallery's programme is ‘Family Day’, every Thursday in the school holidays, in which parents can share the creative experience with their children. Last October the gallery put on the ‘Big Draw’ workshop which prompted children to interact with drawings by Quentin Blake. The aim and, to some extent,

the achievement, was to get children drawing and colouring in Blake's free-spirited fashion.

Leah was keen to point out that all the classes and Family Days are carefully constructed to tie in with whatever exhibitions are currently on. For example, the current exhibition by Roland Hicks, *The Fourth Wall* - which features his slightly eccentric barrier-like structures - will be the inspiration for a forthcoming Family Day when children and older family members will be encouraged to make their own 3D assemblages out of found objects and everyday bits and pieces that might not normally be seen as art materials.

### SMASH INTO COLOUR

Occasionally, Leah allows, the workshops can get pretty noisy. She remembers one printing class in which children were allowed to borrow stones from the beach and use them to smash plants into calico cloth. The pigments explode from the greenery but, of course, the sound and sights of kids smashing stones down again and again was a bit disconcerting for bewildered visitors.

The gallery also has an outreach programme involving making links with local schools. This often entails going into schools to work with and, with luck, inspire the children. But, schools also bring groups in: one local school is apparently bringing in a GCSE group to film a dance piece in the big gallery.

### SIP AND DRAW LIFE

For older members of the Hastings' community, there are all sorts of adult classes. There are the enticing ‘Sip and Draw’ life drawing classes when a little bit of wine or beer might help to remove inhibitions or fear of failure. Other options include skills-based classes, such as still-life painting, but also art history classes. Again, the aim is to find connections with Hastings and the seafront surrounding the gallery; art inspired by the beach, real and imagined.

The seafront location is very important to the gallery. They have links with the local fishing community and have used that world as an inspiration for workshops. And they are hoping to work with the RNLI to help the venerable institution with its bicentenary celebrations on the beach this year

### UNDERFUNDED

A criticism often leveled at the gallery is that all these offerings have to be paid for, and that certainly cannot be denied. The Towner Gallery in Eastbourne and the De La Warr Pavilion, by contrast, regularly have free exhibitions and access. However, the gallery's Communication Officer, Sophia McNab, pointed us to figures that show that the Hastings

Nevertheless, the gallery tries very hard to keep prices down and offers multiple concessions, particularly for locals. For example, the people of Hastings and St Leonards can get into the gallery at half price (£5) and all under 18s are free. There are also concessions for the disabled, carers, unemployed, students and, in the future, the gallery hopes to help children who receive free school meals attend workshops and get a meal for free.

### A FLEDGLING RELATIONSHIP

What Leah makes particularly clear is that the gallery is constantly evolving its community programme. The whole ‘Pearls of the Sea’ cycle of events is only in its second year and as Leah says, it is still “at a fledgling stage”. The gallery is trying very hard to find out what works and doesn't work for the people of Hastings. They spend a lot of time surveying the opinions of those that attend anything at the gallery. They are, in effect, attempting to strengthen their relationship with the citizens of this creative town.

It is a relationship that is very important to the gallery. For example, the gallery depends upon a roster of about 50 volunteers to help out and most of them are lo-



Contemporary does not receive anywhere near the amount of Arts Council funding as their south coast artsy cousins. In fact, the Towner has about three times the amount of funding as the Contemporary and the De La Warr receives about four times as much. Not for the first time in matters south eastern, Hastings finds itself the poor relation.

Overall, we had the impression that the gallery is finding a new way forward which is built upon the idea of getting closer to the local community. As Leah said, quite forcibly, the aim is to be “not just in Hastings but for Hastings”. It will be quite a challenge but, undoubtedly, the small devoted team that run the gallery are moving things in the right direction.





# A Renter's Rant

**JANE METCALFE gives us one renter's tale.**

My rental story is all too common, particularly in this current climate. It's a story with a happy ending, preceded by one of the most angst-laden periods of my life.

I've always been an inveterate mover. I have owned properties in the past – if you call having a mortgage 'owning'. Fifteen years ago I decided it was time to go back to renting after I sensed, correctly, a change in the property market and got out a week before the collapse in 2008. As a single freelancer working on a fluctuating income, I have always aimed at keeping my outgoings as manageable as possible. When looking for a new place to live, I'd put the word out through the grapevine as well as looking at private rental adverts. It was a system that worked seamlessly, until this recent episode.

## NOTICE TO LEAVE

For six years, from 2016, I lived happily in a quirky little sea-view



flat in central St Leonards at an affordable rent. It was owned by an elderly friend who lived below me and I kept an informal eye out for her, sharing a gin and tonic now and then. I was aware that I

would probably have to move when she died, but as I'd always found places to live easily, it didn't concern me. After her death in 2021, I was informed by her family that it would be two years be-

fore they did anything with the property, giving me time to plan my next move. However, eight months later, I was given six months notice to leave, just as the rental prices started to go through the roof.

As soon as I was given notice, I put the word out. I went to see a pokey one-bedroom flat in the process of being done up, which would be let at nearly £300 more than I was paying at that time. This seemed extortionate for what was on offer, and I turned it down. Then the prices started rocketing upwards. I couldn't get my head around it. Being self-employed, and with a basic state pension, I earned what I considered enough to live on. As it began to sink in that the extortionate rents weren't going away, my disbelief turned to anger. How did anybody in the property game think that those on low to average incomes could suddenly magic a further £300-500 out of thin air to pay for a roof over their head?

## A FAILING SYSTEM

I contacted Citizens Advice, and other agencies who could only offer suggestions of staying put, waiting out the section 21 period, getting evicted and being rehoused that way. Call it stubborn,

but I wasn't ready to be packaged up and put through a failing social system that was crammed with people far worse off than me. I persisted with my way and, through somebody I knew, was offered a temporary studio flat at a rent that was only just about affordable.

When I moved, I let go of a lot of my furniture and belongings. I felt deeply disempowered, and it took me some time to readjust to the new realities of the UK. I call it 'Nouveau Pauvre'.

Then, out of the blue, a friend told me of an empty property near where I'd previously lived and suggested I put a note through the door saying I would be interested in renting it. Even though it was a wild shot, I wrote a note, put it through the letterbox and forgot about it. Four months later the landlord contacted me and asked if I was still interested in renting the place. I went round to see it, liked it and said yes, if I could afford it. I held my breath as he suggested the rent. It was exactly at the top end of what I could afford! After ten months in transit I finally moved into my new home.

I consider myself fortunate, and my heart goes out to those, and there are many, who are in positions far worse than mine.

# Living the Rental Nightmare

My partner D and I are both 65. He is in poor health. We have lived in our current ground floor flat on St Leonards seafront for five years.

We originally lived together in Tunbridge Wells, where I had a housing association tenancy. After ten years' occupation I exercised my right to buy. Six years later, both of us became ill. We decided that our best option was to sell our home and live off the balance of the proceeds while we coped with the debilitating treatment.

We had personal connections in St Leonards, and I was attracted by its strong art connections. So in 2008 we rented a flat on St Leonards seafront at a modest rent. Over the next 15 years we moved a few times. In 2018 we moved to a ground floor at Marina. The leasehold owner lived in the basement flat below, and I thought we had a good relationship.



## A SUDDEN RENT JUMP

In late 2021 this owner told me that she needed to raise money and was therefore going to increase our rent by £100 per month. She assumed we could get increased benefit to cover this. She became angry when I explained to her that this was not the case. I wrote to her to say that we could just pay the increase if we were careful. But she responded on the telephone that she had now decided to sell the flat. She served an eviction notice under section 21

in February 2022 giving us four months to leave.

At first, she did not pursue it. However, she clearly felt that we had obstructed her recovery of the flat unreasonably, and from that point on our relationship deteriorated rapidly. She shouted at me in the street and made me feel uncomfortable every time our paths crossed. D was, by this time, quite ill with cancer.

Last July the owner served another section 21 notice. Eventually we were ordered to vacate by

25 October last year, though I had applied for a longer period of notice on the grounds of D's illness. After intervention by the Brighton Housing Trust, the vacation date was extended to 22 November.

## AN OVERWHELMED COUNCIL

I applied for re-housing to Hastings Borough Council. They wouldn't offer any assistance until an eviction notice had been turned into a court order. They clearly had far too many needy people for the amount

of homes available. Phone calls went unanswered. They did offer us a two-bedroom flat on the ninth floor of a tower block in Hollington. I replied that, for health reasons, I didn't feel it was suitable. I was told that the only alternative might be a single room for up to two years!

I looked at available lettings in the private sector, but was told that we needed to show that our annual income was 30 times the monthly rent. That meant that, for a flat in London Road advertised at £850 per month, we would need to show income above £25,000. We couldn't, and never would.

## A CRUEL SYSTEM

However, Brighton Housing Trust continued to give us amazing help – I don't know what we would have done without them. And eventually the council has offered us somewhere acceptable to live. By the time this article is published we expect to have moved in.

I don't blame the owner of our Marina flat for wanting us out. But she seems to have blamed us for a situation we didn't create. I don't blame any individual for the catastrophic housing problem. There is just something wrong with the system. Something very wrong.





## COMMUNITY

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



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](mailto:community@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk) marked *Clean Water Watch*.

**LESSONS FROM THE POST OFFICE SCANDAL**

We can learn much from the Post Office scandal and why it has finally hit the front pages and got everyone talking after years of dogged campaigning. The first thing is that although we know money is the root of all evil, we do need constant reminding of that fact. Secondly, although most people are basically honest and trustworthy, we have a tendency to act in a tribal way, taking sides in any disagreement. Politics and social media aside, this can result in company employees 'defending the brand' and believing the narrative they are being fed by management – as appears to have been the case with Post Office Ltd. Changing narratives requires a convincing replacement, and what better than a dramatisation of suffering.

But perhaps the most important lesson is that it is possible to win as long as we are sufficiently tenacious. I say 'we' but it usually takes an extraordinary person like Alan Bates (as well as the reporter Nick Wallis) to be the catalyst for action. Without all the hard work, spanning two decades, there would have been no *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* on ITV. And as one person said recently on social media, "There could be a whole TV channel devoted to scandal dramas." So once we've established that truth tends to go out the window when large sums of money are at stake, we need to be aware of the hard work required to establish and publicise the facts.

**BETTER TOGETHER**

Another lesson from the Post Office scandal is that we are never the 'only one' and are better together. All sorts of groups have been popping up to take on the water companies: Surfers Against Sewage, BoycottWaterBills, Wild-Fish, Windrush Against Sewage Pollution and our own Hastings Clean Water Action. Each one has emerged for different reasons but with one thing in common: holding

the water companies to account. And they are now beginning to work together more and more.

Lewes Climate Hub is an alliance of 32 local environmental and community groups ranging from Seaford Environmental Alliance to Lewes Swift Supporters, from Lewes Extinction Rebellion to Compost Club. The hub has also signed up to Wave 5 of the Dirty Water Campaign, a UK-wide wastewater bill boycott. (See [lewesclimatehub.org/water](http://lewesclimatehub.org/water)). The Dirty Water Campaign itself had already been given added impetus when Extinction Rebellion UK and BoycottWaterBills.com recently joined forces with it.

**FACTS ARE IMPORTANT**

The narrative from government and water companies is that little can be done to fix the problem of sewage until some mythical time in the future, and that public ownership is not an option. So it was good to read an article in the Guardian written by 'experts in the field' on "how to reverse the tide". *How could England's water system be fixed?* 10 January

You might not agree with the proposed solutions of the experts, but they all believe that re-nationalisation is possible and would not be too costly.

Dr Ewan McGaughey, a professor of law at King's College London, explains how it can be done "using the legal framework of special administration that already exists".

Richard Murphy, of the Corporate Accountability Network and Sheffield University, believes that no compensation is due to shareholders, or to those who lent money to the companies.

Dieter Helm, a professor of economic policy at Oxford University, does not believe in re-nationalisation, but refutes the view that it would cost too much.

**REWARDING FAILURE**

Just as Fujitsu has been showered with government contracts despite the Horizon scandal, so in the water

industry. Another Guardian article describes how Pennon Group PLC, the owner of South West Water has just been allowed to buy Sutton and East Surrey Water (Guardian, 10 January). South West Water is one of the worst-performing companies for high level of pollution incidents. It will be interesting to see if anything changes now that Fujitsu is in the spotlight.

**LACK OF INVESTMENT, LACK OF OVERSIGHT**

The government's bonfire of red tape and systematic running down of the country's infrastructure has led to a situation where things are beginning to fall apart. A recent article in the Guardian (10 January 2024) addresses issues raised in a comprehensive report published by The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management. The article explains that "increased sewage pollution, urban flooding and water interruptions are the result of decades of failures by the Conservative ministers". The report points out that "Over 30 years on from water privatisation, with widespread urbanisation and agricultural intensification, a fresh approach – including potential reform of water regulators – is needed." None of this would surprise most people but it is good to have it confirmed.

An example of this is a BBC online article (18 January) entitled *Darlington: Old sewage system 'will not cope with new houses'*. Neither the Environment Agency nor Northumbrian Water raised any concerns about the plans of Darlington Council to build 10,000 homes over the next ten years – according to the council – and the local Conservative MP had been assured by Northumbrian Water there is "sufficient capacity". However, according to a local Green councillor, the sewage system is known to be overcapacity and that the River Skerne will be environmentally damaged by the planned building. A situation surely that resonates with the people of Hastings.



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Michel Baie



Taylor Flowe



## Why are Teachers Leaving the Profession?

**With almost a third of teachers leaving the profession within five years of starting, former teacher CALLUM THOMSON explores why.**

Recent data released by the Department for Education shows that in 2021/22, 39,930 teachers, 8.8% of the teaching workforce, left the profession for reasons other than retirement. This rate is higher among early career teachers with 12.8% leaving after a year following their initial training, and a third leaving within five years. I left after two years at a Hastings school. I can't speak for teachers generally; teachers quit for many reasons not to be captured here, but in my experience, the primary source of teacher dissatisfaction came from staff regularly feeling unsuccessful at their jobs.

Conversely, the teachers I observed with positive relationships to their work seemed to experience some reward for their efforts; either they were good at teaching and were sustained by their evi-

dent success, or, taking a more wide-angled view, were able to trace a net-positive despite inevitable daily setbacks. But for the young and inexperienced teachers who are leaving the profession at the fastest rate, early negative experiences can put them off the profession entirely.

Being good at teaching is difficult and the punishment for failure, cruel. Teaching requires the simultaneous use of multiple techniques which take time to perfect. Learning should be pitched to challenge but provide regular opportunities for success. Behaviour must be managed through a toolkit of routine teacher responses which establish a consistent relationship between sanction and reward. Language must be economical but engrossing or meaning will be lost. Tone of voice, classroom position, body language, non-verbal gestures are all other, subtle techniques through which a 'positive classroom climate' is set. But the potential pitfalls are numerous, and to an in-

experienced teacher, even the most basic condition necessary for learning - maintaining the purposeful focus of students in a classroom - feels precarious. It takes years of dedicated practice for the room to feel stable, occurring only when these techniques become automatic.

**“Although well-intentioned, with every rule change, both staff and students were more likely to view systems as arbitrary and adherence became less likely.”**

Mastery of any profession is difficult. Perhaps more particular to teaching, then, is the punishment for lack of mastery. In a negative climate, the relationship between teachers and students is oppositional. A poorly planned lesson which asks students to use skills not yet fully learnt results in failure; an inconsistent approach to behaviour creates a sense of injustice; a clumsily worded phrase causes confusion and a

loss of focus while poor teacher positioning can lead to sections of the room feeling unaccountable and free to distract. These setbacks create mutual frustration, which can lead to experiences of conflict and abuse. A school leader once told me to ignore the “black dot in the white page,” the only negative in an otherwise positive day. But I found the black dots difficult to ignore when they were as stark as receiving abuse. Though these incidents came from very few students, their impact was class-wide; the black dot turned the whole room grey.

There is then the second necessary quality to feeling successful as a teacher: assuming a wide-angled view with personal impact. After all, teaching is a team game, so responsibility for outcomes is dispersed among the staff body. This is necessary: schools need to function as all-pervasive systems in order to attain a net-positive outcome. But all-pervasive systems are also difficult to achieve. To work, systems must feel normative rather than arbitrary, meaning individ-

students were more likely to view systems as arbitrary and adherence became less likely.

If poor teacher retention stems from teachers lacking experiences of success, what can be done? Inexperienced teachers need strong systems to support them. Without student trust that the system will work as it should, teachers are isolated, wielding only their individual classroom command, which varies significantly with experience and expertise. Again, less-than-expert teachers accumulate conflict. If systems are to succeed, they need to be clear and durable. Consistent and strong leadership is essential to achieve this.

And if lack of expertise is particularly punishing in teaching, how can young teachers be better trained? I'm critical of teacher training providers, namely Teach First. As a Teach First trainee, I was given a 70% timetable having never taught and having received minimal training.

Though some thrive, others drown in a deluge of negative experiences, amassing a stain of black dots which can hinder one's ability to think “this might be the profession for me.” Training programmes provided through higher education introduce new teachers gradually to coal-face teaching and place emphasis on learning the techniques first. This, in my experience, provides greater early opportunities for success, and is reflected in the retention statistics: the retention rate for Teach First teachers one year after initial training was 69%, compared to 87% for teachers trained through HE (source: The National Foundation of Education).

Teaching is hard. Teachers need the support of secure systems to feel successful. Without them, it is a stressful job, one which can feel like it primarily constitutes absorbing conflict, rather than teaching and inspiring young people.

■ For more of Callum's writing, go to his blog, *Day Off @ day-offthoughts.blog*





## OPINION

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

Rosie Brocklehurst makes headlines as Labour Press officer.

## Suppressing Dissent

**As a Labour Press Officer under Neil Kinnock, ROSIE BROCKLEHURST helped the party electable in the 1990s. But now she welcomes the resignation of Hastings Councillors from the party and argues that Labour under Keir Starmer has become overly authoritarian.**

I first came across the queen of focus groups, Deborah Mattinson, in 1985. With the late Philip Gould she advised Neil Kinnock and Peter Mandelson as part of Labour's Shadow Communications agency, largely credited with helping to change the Party's image. Deborah is now a chief strategist to Keir Starmer. Labour is now so fixated by focus groups that it has lost touch with its grassroots.

I had joined Labour as one of two Press Officers in 1984 from LWT where I had a great time as PR for the South Bank Show and Weekend World, where Peter Mandelson also worked.

Working for Labour sobered me up. For a start, there had been a disastrous 1983 election defeat. You could hear a pin drop at Labour's HQ in Walworth Road. Everyone was depressed. There was no money. Peter Mandelson's office had one table with a broken leg which we propped up on books.

But change was afoot, not least to improve the shambolic pres-

entation of Labour in a world mediated through Conservative-friendly press and television. The red flag was about to be replaced by the red rose.

Eager and strained, Kinnock had been given the task of shaping the ranks, making the Party more effective and professional and getting rid of entryists like Militant. They had their own party after all.

But Murdoch's Sun adored Thatcher. This was an era, just post-Falklands war and pre-miners' strike, of greed-is-good, mass privatisation and the sale of the family silver – which included oil licences that could have given us a sovereign wealth fund like Norway – and of course, the water companies who were starved of funds before sell-off.

### DEMONSTRATE COMPETENCE

When Kinnock visited the USA, he was almost completely ignored (unlike Blair, welcomed by Clinton a decade later). After the 1987 and 1992 defeat, it would take many more years to expose the hollow policies of the Conservatives, woo Murdoch and polish the spin machine. We had also to find a different, charismatic leader and reach an understanding with the electorate. To give the Labour Party a chance we had to demonstrate competence and promise Britain

would have a new place on the world stage. But under Blair came the Iraq War, which diminished his reputation and undermined his government.

Thirty years on and the latest attempt to mould the Party into an image of something that people might vote for again is in its final stages. 'Anything is better than the Conservatives' seems to be the mantra. But why should we expect so little from the party most likely to replace them? This is not representative politics. It is a 'false dawn' – to borrow a phrase used by my favourite pessimistic philosopher, John Gray.

When the politics of consent is replaced by the politics of suppressing dissent, which is what has happened under the uncharismatic Keir Starmer who got into power on ten pledges and then ditched them, the political discourse which must involve some freedom of thought is threatened. The Party becomes authoritarian, lacks grass roots energy and starts to atrophy.

I was asked by HIP's Politics editor if it was not important to control unruly constituency Labour Parties? I realised he too had fallen for the centrist spin. CLP meetings were, until 2015, moribund dull affairs of members who were useful for fundraising and stuffing envelopes. Debate was silenced entirely under General Secretary Ian McNichol in 2015/16.

Locally, Labour has been dic-

would rather pay those companies than fund doctors and nurses properly.

Yes, I do like discipline. But unruliness has its place. To my mind it has been the only thing that has ever brought about genuine social change. Women only got the vote because of the unruliness of the suffragettes. Trade unions when they flexed muscles in syndicalist form, were the bedrock of early forms of the Labour party back in the 19th century.

I understand as a nation, we can't live by unruliness. People want peace, security, safety, food on the table, warmth, housing, and education. We have to trust our leaders to do what we want them to do at some point, so they can try to provide these things, while they in turn need us occasionally to put down the pitchforks and conform. Discipline is one of the key markers of an effective force for change. But authoritarianism stokes fear and muffles new ideas.

### DISCIPLINE AND PURGING

Currently in Labour, express any form of dissent at all and you are immediately called an extreme leftwinger or a 'Trot' – epithets drawn from an abusive lexicon. It's your dissent they can't abide. It then becomes a matter of not having any individual view at all. This is why at the Hastings Hustings for Labour's PPC neither questions nor statements from the floor

ings in 2017 to talk to a group of young Labour members about a renewed Party. I showed him round. Jon is married to Anna Healy, a former press officer who worked with me at the Press Office under Neil Kinnock. In his new book *A Century of Labour*, Cruddas says: "It is difficult to identify the purpose of a future Starmer government ... Labour appears to be content for the coming election to amount to a referendum on the performance of the governing Conservatives rather than a choice between competing visions of politics and justice."

In London, Labour Party strategists believe that most council tax payers don't really understand that their payments only cover a tiny part of council budgets. They are not concerned that it is Conservative government cuts which are to blame for reduced services in Hastings. Dissenting Labour councillors therefore can be accused of cutting services and take the rap. In this way, Labour nationally would rather destroy their own members, not simply because of an obsession with command and control, but because of a strategy which is to claim the territory upon which the Conservatives stand, convinced that this is the only way to win power.

This is not broad-church politics. It is a triangulation which will end up suffocating authentic local voices because its only objective is power for power's sake.



tated to by the national party. Hastings' Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) is not local – whatever she has claimed – and was parachuted in from Merton. She is a supporter of Wes Streeting who said he would encourage private companies to come into the NHS to help bring down waiting lists. I believe by his actions he

were allowed. Discipline and purging will never replace values or principles.

Two weeks after eight leading Hastings councillors left Labour to become Independents, Jon Cruddas MP, founder of Blue-Collar Labour, was the subject of a story in the Observer by Toby Helm the Political Editor, who visited Hast-

We are facing huge challenges in this country and in this town and, goodness, we need able leadership. But currently 'The Party' does not want to tell you what to think. It wants you not to think at all.

Local elections are set for May. I hope some Independents stand in Hastings and change the way politics is done.





# Shockwaves From Gaza

**GUY HARRIS, the Hastings Liberal Democrat spokesman on national affairs, says Keir Starmer and other British politicians must do more to address the Israel-Palestine conflict – as must the wider international community.**

The brutal Hamas terror attacks of October 7 seem destined to become what commentators call an ‘inflexion point’ in Middle East history. It wasn’t just Israel caught flat-footed by the attack, many of our own politicians seemed disorientated and overwhelmed. They defaulted to predictable mantras whilst weighing short-term political calculations. Even over the cries of human pain and the crash of bombs, I fancied I heard cans being kicked down the road.

This time, however, politicians must rise to the occasion. As South Africa’s motion in the International Criminal Court forces Israel to rebut charges of genocide, a compassionate British public is paying more attention to the long-standing plight of Palestinians and looking to our parliamentarians for some moral leadership.

In the wake of the attacks, Sir Keir Starmer was first through the mill. His *raison d’être* in previous years has been to remind us that he’s not Jeremy Corbyn. This ob-

amongst the first to call for a ceasefire, and Layla Moran, in particular, led the conversation in Parliament and nationally. With honourable exceptions, the Conservative position was predictable, but frankly, this is bigger than party politics, and consensus should be sought.

Compassion aside though, why should we care about what happens in Gaza? Well, because it really does touch our lives, and its part in the fracturing of Hastings Labour Party is but one minor example.

## COLONIAL BAGGAGE

Connecting the dots though, Britain helped give birth to the State of Israel, and our colonial baggage influences relations with all countries of the region, not least Iran. We’re also a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the ‘arbiter’ of international peace, law and security.

We trade with Israel too. In the Spring of 2023, James Cleverly, busking as Foreign Secretary, signed the UK-Israel bilateral ‘roadmap’, which signalled a deeper trade and security alliance and, incidentally, seemed to endorse Israel’s far-right government – some of whose ministers live in illegal settlements and are vocal opponents of the ‘two-state solution’: a position which fundamen-



Caption War in Gaza

scenes in Israel and by some words and deeds at home. Lastly, Tel Aviv’s close political and defence ties with the US are also of significance to the UK.

So Israel is important to us. As, by extension, is its treatment of the five million Palestinians over whom it presides. Their plight is felt acutely by British Muslims, and with over 20,000 Palestinian men, women and children killed since October by the Israeli Defence Force, it begins to corrode social cohesion here and provide narratives to the radicalisers.

hard-pressed families in Hastings and elsewhere. Few give much thought to trade through the Suez Canal, but they may when its interruption begins to inflate the price of goods or fuel.

Another corollary is defence spending. As the MoD decommissions destroyers and recruitment falls, can we afford Grant Schapps’ threats of military action against Houthis in Yemen? The Iranian-sponsored militias have weathered years of Saudi bombing. Like Hamas and Hezbollah, their dark light has not been dimmed. Islamic State are getting in on the act too. So, what’s the scope of this operation and where’s the money coming from? Plunging Britain into open-ended counterinsurgency would suit Iran just fine. Tehran is shrewd enough to know further escalation is unnecessary if it can simply bleed Israel, Britain and America physically and financially through proxy wars. Putin would be delighted too.

## CYNICAL ASSERTION

A deeper context is that, for many, October 7 highlighted the fallacy of Netanyahu’s cynical assertion that Israel’s occupation could be managed into mundanity by military means. A succession of British politicians have accepted this prospectus because it was easier than taking tough moral decisions, even those which accorded with our own values, policies and legal obligations. Now it’s painfully clear there’s no military solution, and it’s not in Britain or America’s interest to support Netanyahu’s endless war – or his ultra-nationalist coalition.

Our political leaders cannot apply short-term electorally expedi-

ent logic to long-term foreign policy issues. We cannot afford to continue to give an increasingly immoderate ally diplomatic cover when it threatens our social cohesion, compromises our principles and corrodes the public’s faith in the rules based international order which complements our democracy. If we endorse the basic tenets of international and humanitarian law, we have to uphold them – and promote them most powerfully to our friends. But, I’m not naïve. That’s easier said than done.

Do we expect Israel to talk with the people who murdered over a thousand civilians? Do we expect Palestinians to sit calmly round the table with their ears still ringing and their dead unburied? The answer is no. Not now at least. But, in the long term what’s the alternative? Both sides need to take a huge leap of faith. As does the international community and its partners in Turkey, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi and Egypt. That’s what diplomacy is for. It’s hard, but the alternative is endless suffering and a denial of self-determination. And the truth is, in the cause of peace, we do talk to terrorists, nationalists and insurgents.

The greatest aid we can provide to our ally is wise counsel. We must convince Israel that peace is incompatible with occupation. The ‘day after’ cannot just be the status quo. It must acknowledge Israel’s security needs and, finally, realise Palestinian sovereignty and statehood. It’s in our interest and in Israel’s to cease the violence, and find honest brokers to free surviving hostages, advance peaceful coexistence and free both peoples from their own history.



session confounded his response to Israel’s increasingly disproportionate assault on Gaza, placing him at odds with swathes of his own party and a growing constituency beyond. He was so fuddled as to claim on LBC that Israel had the right to impose collective punishment on a civilian population. I’m glad to say the Lib Dems were

tally contradicts UK policy. Trade with Israel is worth about £3bn a year – not inconsiderable given the UK’s straightened circumstances. Britain has strong religious and social connections to Israel too, via 350,000 British Jews, who represent one of our oldest minority groups – one that has been traumatised and tormented by the

But there are other consequences of letting this fifty-seven-year-old sore continue to suppurate. The displacement of two million Gazans from their homes would not seem to me to lessen the global problem of migration – a cause presently dominating British politics. Similarly, allowing the conflict to escalate will ultimately hit





## ARTS

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

# A Generous Dose of Brazilian Sun

CALLUM THOMSON

Braziliant is a night of music, dancing and culture inspired by Samba, the Afro-Brazilian art form. Co-organiser, Dan Wiltshire, wants to make Hastings “the sunniest place in the UK”. Co-organiser Vik Thompson’s inspiration for the night came from her time living in Rio de Janeiro, where the spirit of samba “is everywhere”.

Her descriptions are evocative: “Favelas where samba gatherings emerge spontaneously. Limes, *cachaça* and odd pieces of ice fill a communal vessel, and fuel a deep-rooted physical engagement in samba music and dance.” Rio residents



possess the movement of samba within them, she says, which springs forth effortlessly. As a dance movement psychotherapist, Thompson has an interest in the physical and mental health benefits of samba. She notes its aerobic quality, the psychological state of flow one can reach when fully integrated within its rolling rhythms, and the inclusive communities which can be formed through it.

Walking along the seafront towards the White Rock Hotel Bar on a stormy, post-Christmas December night, I felt far away from the streets of Rio. I wondered whether the spirit of samba would transport to a culture which at this time of year tends to hunker down, overeat and vegetate. And as a crowd we did take a bit of time to warm up: many elected to spend the first part of the evening sipping

on the delicious *caipirinhas* and bobbing to Thompson’s, and DJ Cate Brick’s, smooth bossa nova selection. But the basement venue allowed the sun to slowly fill the space uninterrupted from the outdoor reality, and gradually, the cold, blustery outside felt far away.

The crowd fully immersed, Thompson treated us to a (necessarily diluted) beginner’s workshop in samba dancing – apologising on our behalf to any Brazilians present – set to a moody, pared-back beat: Gilles Petersen’s dub edit of *Aquarela Do Brasil* which DJ Dan Wiltshire considerably monitored and adjusted as we were put through our paces. The dance floor hummed as we collectively butchered what proved to be basic but quite tricky moves: among other things, I found moving with enough speed to fit three small body movements between each beat challenging. But here, I was reminded of the unique spirit of Hastings and St Leonards: open, diverse, indulgent, uninhibited, which perhaps makes it a perfect town for Braziliant to take root.

The evening flowed easily from here, though after Thompson left her teaching platform the Brazilian moves we were taught largely went out the window, and our homegrown interpretations dominated again. DJ Soul Provyder took us through the rest of the evening with a more eclectic but always irresistibly danceable mix of Latin-inspired records, including Sergio Mendes’ iconic *Mas Que Nada*, Beth Carvalho’s energetic *Coisinho do Pai*, and *Mar Afunda* by Os Novos Crioulos. Maybe it was the *caipirinhas*, but I left the venue energised, facing once more the stormy seafront.

Wiltshire and Thompson have big plans: there is a monthly night, an annual festival, and a special *Mardi Gras* (our own Fat Tuesday) edition of Braziliant in the pipeline. In the spirit of Samba, both see this project as a springboard for collaboration with musicians, dancers or selectors who have a connection with the sun-filled, rhythmic, romance of Samba or Brazilian culture. If that sounds like you, get in touch.



Dmitri Smirnov

## Upcoming: Two Unmissable Concerts

VICTORIA KINGHAM

In 2024, St Leonards Concerts once again take an innovative approach. The eclecticism of what they present has always been in evidence – what is maybe less apparent is that the performances generally have a theme and a *raison d’être*

that makes them more memorable still. These new programmes are no exception.

Concert organiser and solo violinist Max Baillie writes: “In February we present two specially-curated programmes featuring star guest artists: the first is on a theme of *Love and Mania* with award-win-

ning singer Alice Zawadzki and string quartet. It includes music by Caetano Veloso, Janacek, folk songs, Schubert, and more. The second is on the theme of *Transfigured Night*, featuring Schoenberg’s epic string sextet of the same name (*Verklärte Nacht*), set in a dark wood and written at the cusp of modernist classical music meeting the high romantic old style of the 19th century, plus music by Tchaikovsky and Widmann.

**Concert 1:** *Love & Mania* will feature music for voice and string

quartet by Caetano Veloso, Janáček (the fiery Kreutzer Sonata), de Falla (Spanish Folk Songs), Schubert (*Death and the Maiden*), and more. The singer will be Alice Zawadzki. Besides being a wonderful singer, Zawadzki is an accomplished linguist and will sing the songs, which include Veloso’s haunting Cucurucú Paloma, in the original languages. Dmitry Smirnov is a very young, brilliant Russian violinist who, like Baillie, is interested in, and can present with excellence, an extraordinarily wide range of styles and genres. Max Baillie, ever versatile, plays viola rather than violin. The Australian violinist Bridget O’Donnell already collaborates with the great Misha Mullov-Abbado (superb and gifted bass player whom we have been fortunate to see in St Leonards for a number of performances) presenting programmes of folk music and jazz as well as notable classical pieces. Kirsten Jenson is a chamber music specialist and teacher, having already performed a similarly broad range of solo concerts throughout the UK and Europe.

**Concert 2:** *Transfigured Night* will allow us to hear some of the greatest music for string sextet. If you haven’t heard Schoenberg’s transcendent *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night) go immediately, find it, listen, and weep at its spectrographic movement, its icy chromatics, its querulous melodic

searchings and yearning resolutions. Astonishing to think that a young Schoenberg composed it over just three weeks one summer *over a hundred years ago*, yet it retains a unique, complex, and dramatic modernity. Jörg Widmann’s *180bpm* by contrast was written almost a hundred years later, in 1993. It’s frighteningly intense, insistent, equally dramatic, with some surprisingly folksy melodic lines somewhere inside the techno-inspired overall form.

There is a significant commonality of interest in all these musicians: all of them are interested in moving away from the rather staid niche position formerly held by classical music, and by nature of their highly-developed gifts they are able to bring this exceptional program to the public eye. This promises to be one of the best concerts of the season here, or indeed anywhere.

■ *Love and Mania and Transfigured Night* will be performed at Christ Church, Silchester Road, St Leonards, on 3 and 4 February, at 7.30 pm and 5 pm respectively. These are guaranteed to be sell-out concerts. Tickets can be obtained now at [stlconcerts.co.uk](http://stlconcerts.co.uk). Children under 13 are admitted free. Half-price concessions are offered for artists, professional musicians, and all under-30s, who should email [STLconcerts@gmail.com](mailto:STLconcerts@gmail.com) for a discount code before booking.





## Anna Smirnova Holds Kyiv in the palm of her hand

## A Unique Musical and Creative Performance

**The House of the Stone that Spoke, an experiential theatre performance, ran to sold out houses throughout the Christmas period. JUDY DEWSBERY has been to many of ExploreTheArch's performances exploring domestic life.**

On every visit to Archer Lodge, ExploreTheArch's intimate theatre venue, it appears completely different, and I can never make out where the other events took place! This time, I loved the atmosphere in the attics where the performance was staged. The spaces resonate with my own experience of living in a similar building in this town. Attic spaces hold a lot

of possible stories: in our own attic, for instance, we found a letter under the floorboards, postal date 1901, from an unhappy mother to her daughter. Houses seem to give out their amazing history in their own time, in their own way.

Attending just after New Year, we invited my daughter-in-law, Mae Dewsbery, and niece, Sadie Dewsbery, to share their experience of this production. This is what they wrote:

## A SPECIAL EXPERIENCE

This was the first time I had been to an ExploreThe Arch performance. I was excited from what I had heard from others but also had no idea what to expect as I was aware that each event was so different.

From the moment we arrived and passed under the book arch I knew it was going to be a special experience. I loved being serenaded by the harp music as we waited for the whole group to arrive – although it was so civilised I wasn't sure how my 10-year-old daughter would take to the evening! But once we set off upstairs, she entered into the adventure in high spirits, following the path of stones that led up to the attic of the stately building.

In each of the three rooms we were treated to an intimate, musical and creative performance that sparked wonder in my daughter. It was amazing to be so close to performers Elizabeth and Cath-

erine as they played their harps with such mind-blowing talent.

The food served at the end was a nice opportunity to be able to talk to the other audience members and to the performers. We left feeling that we had been part of something really special... a hidden gem in our home town.

The beautiful spirits of performers Anna Smirnova, Elizabeth Isadora and Catherine Rajhans stayed with me afterwards as I reflected upon the journey they had been on this past year – such an inspiration to me and my daughter.

## SOME BACKGROUND FROM GAIL BORROW, DIRECTOR

The production depicted the lives of three intrepid sisters from Kyiv, living 1,000 years ago. Their travels developed connections across Europe and the story of their achievements offers a rich, diverse cultural landscape in which to consider Hastings Castle (1067). In the production, these herstories were explored by three performers who have themselves relocated from Kyiv to Hastings.

Anna Smirnova performed aspects of Anne of Kyiv, who became Queen of France in 1051. In her performance, Anna depicts the statue of Anne of Kyiv's father, Yaroslav the Wise, holding Kyiv in the palm of his hand. Yaroslav was indeed wise enough to educate his daughters. Anna is pictured here holding one of the many stones that she has collected since relocating to Hastings from Kyiv and during this production's rehearsal process.

Catherine Rajhans explored Elisiv of Kyiv, wife of Harald of Norway, the invader killed by Harold of England at Stamford Bridge in 1066. Catherine composed two new pieces for *The House of the Stone that Spoke*, which she played in this production. These were *Hastings Castle* and *Ode to Elisiv* (the woman from Kyiv who almost became the Queen of England).

Elizabeth Isadora was inspired by Anastasia of Kyiv, the political figure whose connections with Hungary, Germany and Austria she depicted as a woman travelling a winding path. Elizabeth linked this symbolism to Leoš Janáček's composition suite, *On an Overgrown Path*. Piece number 10 is *Sýček neodletěl!* (The Owl Has Not Flown Away) and relates to the William Morris & Co wallpaper that Elizabeth chose; this features winding paths inspired by the symbolism in mediaeval art. The motifs were explored in isolation, through shadows with which the audience interacted.

## ARTS DIARY

## THE SPIRIT IN THE DUST

*Kino-Teatr, St Leonards, 20  
February, 7.30pm*

Original dance/music performance featuring Japanese Butoh-influenced dancer Yumino Seki, with music from Afrit Nebula and images by Mark French. Seki is a UK-based Japanese dancer, teacher, performer and therapist. This is a triumphant return after the premiere back in September. The inspiration is a quote from Albert Einstein: "Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper." Seki dances the role of a world spirit. Moving images are projected onto a translucent kinetic screen to provide a multi-dimensional setting.

## FAIRPORT CONVENTION

*Chequer Mead Theatre, East  
Grinstead, 20 February, 7.30pm*

*Connaught Theatre, Worthing,  
21 February, 7.30pm*

Bit off the beaten track for Hastings residents, but there will no doubt be many fans here of the legendary folk-rock band, still going strong as ever. Expect some long-established Fairport favourites as well as surprises from old and new albums. Founder members Dave Pegg and Simon Nicol have now been almost sixty years on the road.

# TOY STORY

**Electric Palace Cinema, Hastings,  
2 February, 3.30pm and 6.00pm**  
Toy Story, astonishingly made almost thirty years ago, was the first full-length completely computer-animated film and the first from Pixar. It's currently on its fifth sequel, and has been preserved forever in the American Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically signifi-

cant". Tom Hanks voices Woody, and Tim Allen Buzz Lightyear. Like all the best junior fiction, this film contains enough wry adult humour to entertain parents and children alike. Not to be missed.

## STOP MAKING SENSE

**Electric Palace Cinema, Hastings, 2 February, 7.30pm-10.30pm, with Post-Punk Disco.** Classic film by the biggest talking head of them all, David Byrne, complete with massive jacket and ego. Jonathan Demme's legendary concert film follows the band for four days in 1983, and includes *Burning Down the House* and *Psycho Killer*. Fa-fa-fa-fa-fa-fa-fa-fa better to run-run-run-run-run-run-away, but please don't: it's another cult classic, preserved for pioneering use of digital techniques, and that suit (inspired by Japanese Noh Theatre) definitely won't come again.



**TREVOR WATTS**  
**ETERNAL TRIANGLE**

*Kino-teatr, St Leonards, Friday  
26 January, 7.30 p.m.*

Trevor Watts has had a long-standing improvising duo with pianist Veryan Weston and another very different duo with percussionist Jamie Harris, based on rhythmic and melodic ideas. They were wildly appreciated at the Sao Paulo Jazz Festival in Brazil some years ago and also in the Dominican Republic. Eternal Triangle is made up from those two duos.





## LITERATURE

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## BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

# Disconsolate Dreamers: On Pessimism and Utopia

Published by Zer0 Books,  
RRP £9.99

REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will', said Romain Rolland, sadly remembered primarily for being a Stalinist. He used the phrase in a 1919 essay, which was read by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who credits Rolland with coining it, but who is famously remembered as its author.

John Hume, director of the Michigan Economic Center, said that 'research shows pessimists see the world more accurately, but optimists get more good things done!'

And Hastings own poetess, the

Another, rather more explicit, counterweight to the view that optimists have it right comes from Barbara Ehrenreich, whose books critique America's 'just say yes' culture. Her book *Smile or Die* is

“Research shows pessimists see the world more accurately, but optimists get more good things done!”

inestimable Salena Godden, insists that *Pessimism is for Lightweight*.

Thus, Rachid M'Rabty's latest book, subtitled 'On Pessimism and Utopia', faces an uphill struggle against the zeitgeist! There is a hint of where he is coming from in Hume's comment that 'pessimists see the world more accurately'.

on the topic of 'how positive thinking fooled America'.

## COMFORTABLE NESTING BEHAVIOUR, OR EGO MASSAGING

Rachid spends a whole chapter on the rather depressing extreme pessimism of philosopher Arthur

dumping realists, as they, too, are a bit depressing.

Rachid, though, takes a next step, suggesting that, therefore, 'a new imaginative conception must be thought of'. His definition of pessimism allows a dead end so bleak that a hopeful revolt, toward a 'utopia', is necessitated. Thus, the only true hope lies in demolishing the capitalist positivist world system entirely. It is argued that 'optimism' blinkers many people into believing piecemeal reforms and 'I'm alright, Jack' little islets of personal security, within the system, are sufficient, or if not, are at least a stepping stone to a rosy future. When John Hume noted that 'pessimists see the world more accurately', Rachid would agree, 'absolutely so, yes'. But when he says 'optimists get more good things done', he would suggest that, in the short term, for a few individuals, no doubt that can be true, but to really address the global crises facing us today re-

Schopenhauer. Rachid concludes that 'the value of pessimism as a critical device is found in the consciousness-raising assertion that perhaps there is no exit' from the dilemmas of our reality to be found within the context of the current world-system, nor relief to be found in abandoning 'the self or the world' – in Schopenhauer's terms, that would include suicide. It's no wonder, if the argument is left there, that optimists frown upon those less gung-ho positive about things. Ironically, that includes

quires more than a wee bit of psychologically comfortable nesting behaviour, or ego massaging.

In that context, he quotes science-fiction author China Miéville who, seeing us 'at the precipice of ecological collapse and societal catastrophe', argues that 'an alternative world, a changed world, a better world' is a requirement. This is a disconsolate dream in two senses: it derives from that pessimism of the intellect, and is undone by a general positivist optimism that a utopian 'omelette' can be achieved without breaking eggs. Only, therefore, a pessimistic existential crisis can force a road to a real alternative society; only breaking eggs will offer any hope at all.

## DRIVE YOUR INTELLECT AGAINST THE BRICK WALL

By these lights, 'pessimism' dovetails with 'realism', and offers a real glimmer of hope. Thus, ultimately, I guess it sounds quite akin to Rolland and Gramsci's 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. But, no. It requires acknowledging that our present predicament can offer no future at all but one defined by mitigation choices. The old order MUST die, IS dying. The only choices now dictate if we become extinct, or find a way to breach the catastrophe with as many survivors as possible. The failure to find the

stomach for this amongst those seeking a liveable utopian future, hands the field to both the green-washing 'business-as-usual' brigade – a terminal disaster – and/or the alt-right radicals, and/or far-left accelerationists, which, as the 1930s and 40s show us, is the road to hell. Stalinism here, Nazism there, do-nothing but fiddle 'optimistically' within the system. These are not choices at all.

Thus, instead, yes, embrace pessimism. It is not for lightweight, far from it. Instead of an optimistic cop-out, drive your intellect against the intellectual and material brick wall that lies ahead. Therein lies the hope for a new utopian vision, past our all-embracing world-system. Optimists cannot see the woods for the trees, and those of us who can, well, we can see that only a forest fire can grant any future at all. For my money, it would look like a 'left-green anarchism', with communities living sustainably within ecological biomes. Only this can work, and there is no way to achieve it with the current combination of population, ecological degradation, and quasi-religious capitalistic fervour. No wonder people baulk at 'pessimist'/'realism'!

Happy New Year!

■ *Disconsolate Dreamers: On Pessimism and Utopia* is available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road, Hastings TN34 1RE

## CROSSWORD CORNER

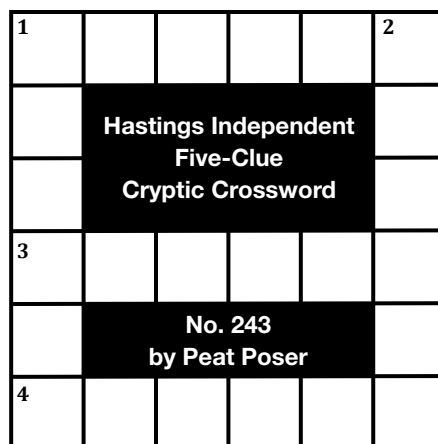
## Across

1. Breakfast from a slim EU (6)
3. Inexpensive pile within company (6)
4. Trout B became another fish (6)

## Down

1. Cast Mo as symbol of good luck (6)
2. Significance of a slim portfolio (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 7 of The HIP List



## POETRY CORNER

### MASK 2020 BEN FAIRLIGHT

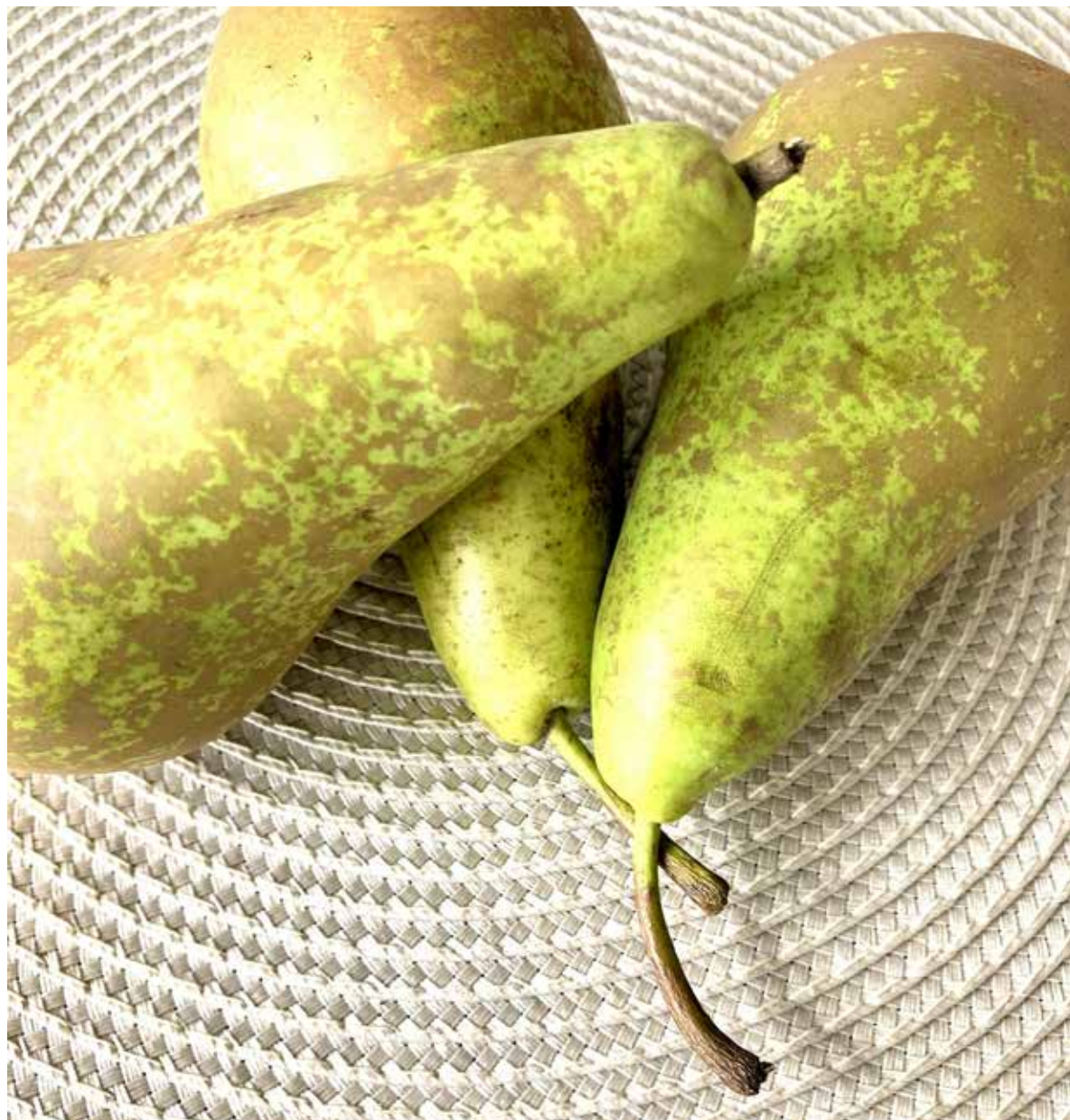
Swimming in a mid-September sea  
I dipped my head under, daringly,  
Then shook my chill-mangled mop like a dog  
To wring out London and its modern smog  
Of covid.

Twisting to a streaky pink-white sky  
I float-watched one lone vapour trail die  
And kicked my shoe-strangled toes like petals  
Sprung from their bud, like steam from a kettle's  
Whistle lid.

Diving at last, I passed a shoal  
Of silver-and-black-banded mackerel  
And shaken was I by their spangled panic  
For their scales were black with a patchy pandemic  
Of gill masks.

Glancing goadingly at me, one said quite fishily:  
"Why's your face so clear uncovered? Can't you see  
We have no shoal-immunity?" Thus I  
Was wrangled back up to the dry, clean washed out by  
An evening's bask.





## Eat Write Love: Pears

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

Fancy something light, tangy and crunchy to go with all those crackers you bought over Christmas and haven't finished yet? This pear chutney will be sure to brighten up any dreary cheese sandwich or leftovers. Bring out the pears, your journal and pen! A winning concoction!

### Journaling #1: Still Life

Either grab yourself some pears or stare at our photo!

Take up a whole page of your journal and sketch the pears as best as you can. There's something comforting in shading and making patterns. Now write onto your sketched pears any words you associate with pears – tastes, textures, dishes, people, places.

### PEARS FUN FACTS:

Two Greek goddesses – Hera and Aphrodite – considered the pear a sacred fruit, connecting it to happiness and self-fulfilment.

In ancient China, pears came to represent immortality and prosperity because the trees on which they grew lived so long.

In Korea, the pear is thought to symbolise grace and nobility, and to serve as a symbol of comfort, bestowing wisdom and health on those lucky enough to eat it.

The trees can live up to 100 years, and the fruit matures but doesn't ripen on the tree – they ripen from the inside out after picking!

### NUTRITION INFO:

- Soluble fibre – supports lowering cholesterol and gut health
- Vitamin C – supports immunity and protects against oxidative damage
- Potassium – supports muscles

and heart health

- Copper – supports immunity and helps manage cholesterol levels

### PEAR CHUTNEY – GREAT WITH CHEESE!

This is a great way to preserve ingredients that you aren't going to eat before they reach the end of their lives. We used pears because they are in season over the winter, but you could use any stone fruit, apples or green tomatoes depending on what you have in the fridge, or if you have excess in the garden.

#### Ingredients:

- 3 large pears, peeled, cored and chopped into 1cm pieces
- 1 medium-sized shallot, peeled and chopped
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 160ml cider vinegar
- 60g soft brown sugar
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 1 inch fresh ginger, peeled and chopped in half (or use 1 tsp ground ginger)
- 1 tbsp raisins or sultanas

#### Method:

1. Gently sauté the shallot in a very little bit of olive oil.
2. Once the shallot is soft, add the chopped pears and cook slowly on low heat for a couple of minutes until the pear softens.
3. Add the cumin seeds, ginger, vinegar, sugar and salt and mix in.
4. Bring to a simmer and then add the raisins.
5. Simmer gently for about 40 minutes, or until the liquid has reduced and you are happy with the consistency.
6. Put the hot chutney into sterilised jars. Either put the

jars through the dishwasher on a hot wash or put them into a hot oven for 10 minutes.  
7. Once cooled, seal up the jars and keep in the fridge.

### SERVING SUGGESTIONS

- This chutney is great with cheeses, but you could also serve with cold meats.
- It also makes a lovely present.

### SUBSTITUTES

This recipe works with apples, tomatoes, apricots, peaches – depending on your fruit, you may want to skip the raisins if you think it might be too sweet.

### STORAGE

Keep in airtight jars. They should be fine in the cupboard, but I do tend to keep mine in the fridge, especially once opened. But they will last happily for a few months if kept sealed.

### Journaling #2: Preserving and Releasing [7 mins]

As you step into the new year, write into these twin ideas which seem to go hand-in-hand. What are you preserving, keeping, intensifying? And what needs releasing as you look to the year ahead? If there is something that might be hard to release, what might make it more palatable?

### Journaling #3: Action! [3 mins]

What's one thing that you relish the idea of doing in 2024? What's the first step?







## SPORT

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## FOOTBALL

# Chalmers Comeback Boosts United Prospects

**1 January:**  
CRAY WANDERERS 0,  
HASTINGS UTD 0  
**6 January:**  
CHESHUNT 2,  
HASTINGS UTD 3  
**13 January:**  
HASTINGS UTD 2,  
DULWICH HAMLET 2

HUGH SULLIVAN

Hastings United have stretched their unbeaten run to ten games since they lost at home to Canvey Island on 25 November. That's all the more impressive when you consider that eight of those games have been away – five in the league, two in the Velocity Cup, one at Eastbourne Borough in the Sussex Cup. It's never been a better time to be

Scott White



Tom Chalmers scoring second goal

a 'U's travelling supporter.

The only blots on the team's record over this time have been less than lustrous showings in home matches at the Pilot Field. In their only home fixture in December the 'U's were held to a 1-1 draw by Bognor Regis Town. And last Saturday, despite the cold conditions, a crowd of over 2,100 saw them draw 2-2 with Dulwich Hamlet after twice taking the lead.

The latter game was distinguished not only by the impressive number of spectators, augmented by a sizeable contingent of Hamlet supporters, but by the triumphant return of Tom Chalmers, who has been missing from the United ranks for a year with anterior cruciate and medial collateral ligament injuries. It took the 21-year-old just 22 minutes to put himself on the scoresheet with a shot from the edge of the penalty area. Six minutes into the second half he

doubled his tally after collecting a pass over the top of the visitors' defence. If anyone doubted whether he would ever again ghost past defenders as he used to do, here was proof: he still can.

His return is a major boost for manager Chris Agutter as he plots the possibilities of his team reaching a play-off position in the league. Jack Bates, who sparked briefly in his loan spell from Derby County, has returned there. However, a midfield which now contains Chalmers, Adam Lovatt and Jack Dixon, another returnee to the 'U's this month following just half a season at Whitehawk, is a force to be reckoned with.

Hastings remains sixth in the league table. Their next two fixtures pit them against teams just below them – away at Carshalton Athletic tomorrow (Saturday), then home to Hashtag United on 27 January.

## CRICKET

# Priory Set to Return to Horntye for 2024



Priory at Claremont, 2023

Sussex Premier League cricket is set to return to Horntye Park for at least one more season following the withdrawal of plans for the Hastings & St Leonards Priory club to relocate permanently to Claremont School (see page 3).

The club last played at Horntye in 2021, taking its home fixtures to Claremont over the past two years in anticipation of the move, and its second, third and junior teams will continue to enjoy the school's hospitality there in 2024. However, Claremont's main ground is not regarded by the Sussex League authorities as big enough to host Premier matches.

In 2022 the Priory first team was allowed to use it as a one-season concession pending the establishment of a new full-size ground. The team was then relegated to Division 2, where the existing ground qualified as adequate.

Last summer, somewhat unexpectedly, Priory won the Division and were promoted back to the Premier League, but that promotion was threatened to be suspended unless another home ground was found.

The Horntye Park Management Company, acting as trustee for Hastings and Rother Trust, has stepped in to help, preparing four wickets on the old cricket square at Horntye which can host up to 12 games in aggregate over the course of the summer. Priory has nine home league fixtures, so up to three cup or other matches can also be accommodated.

The offer is strictly for 2024 only. The trust members remain hopeful that the cricket arena will be dug up for housing construction well before the following summer, and that Priory will then be on the move again.

## ATHLETICS

# Spring Ahead

CHLOE LEFAY

January is cross-country season. At the Sussex county championships at Bexhill earlier this month, athletes and coaches from Hastings Athletics Club (HAC) revelled in a positive exhibition of team spirit, showing the good atmosphere that prevails throughout the club. Different generations of family members competed, chipped in to help, or cheered on the sidelines.

The event itself was cold and muddy, but many athletes saw improvements in their final positions and, with more than half of the season still to go, things look very positive for the club's cross-country teams across all age groups.

HAC runners have also continued to keep a stranglehold on re-

sults at the weekly local Parkrun on St Leonards seafront. Every week they manage top-three places, with club members holding many age group records. Rhys Boorman, for example, the club's endurance coach, recently recorded his 57th Parkrun first place from a total of 72 runs here.

But I think that majority eyes are on spring, when the weather gets easier and track season arrives. HAC is the only club locally that cover so many disciplines for all age groups. Throwing events have taken off like never before, with athletes competing internationally, while interest in sprinting rises as local athletics legend and veteran international Steve Baldock continues to inspire.

This track season there are many events in which the club's various teams will participate.

The YDL (Youth Development League) is a great starting point for young athletes to get involved in competition within the club and is for any junior who turns 11 upwards before 31 August this year. There are two groups within the YDL: U13s and U15s. The club com-

petes against others from the southeast of England in both age ranges. Most of the track and field events – running, jumping and throwing – are scheduled, and there will be fun days out to other regions as well as a much anticipated home fixture.

**The Sussex League** is another great league for juniors. As with the YDL it is for anyone who turns 11 upwards by 31 August.

**QuadKids** contests are for younger kids. They choose three events – one run, one jump and one throw. The points accumulated over all three determine the winner, while all athletes receive a certificate.

**The Southern Athletics League** is for over 16s and above, covering all track and field events. HAC achieved a great result in the last match of the 2023 season to ensure retention of status in Division 2.

**The Masters League** is a laid-back event for over 40s, once again covering all aspects of track and field. HAC are title-holders, having won in 2023.

Overall, HAC athletes broke more club records last year than in



Hastings Athletics Club

Rhys Boorman in front at Parkrun

the previous history of the club. Athletes competed internationally and nationally, as well as just having lots of fun, trying out new things in a relaxed and friendly environment.

■ For more details on any of the above, or if your child would like to be involved in the junior team athletics, contact membership@hastingsathleticclub.co.uk