



INSIDE: The HIP List
*Your Pull Out Guide to
What is Happening in
and Around Hastings*

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INDEPENDENT
JOURNALISM

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HOMES AT RISK!

NAZ MONTAG



PAUL McLAUGHLIN

Residents living in Foxcote and Penhurst Close (below Little Ridge Ave) have been forced to abandon their homes as a major landslide threatens to push their properties into the stream known as Old Roar Gill.

The landslide began on Monday 12 February and has continued to take out one side of the bank at the

top of the Gill, near the Old Roar waterfall. The first sign of a problem was when several residents in the area spotted big cracks on the path behind their homes after a sustained period of heavy rainfall. Two days later Dr Ralitsa Hiteva, a resident in Foxcote, was terrified to hear the cracking of trees and to see her garden fence hanging in mid-air as part of the bank of the Gill, including part of her path, collapsed and was washed away.

The events were reported to Hastings Borough Council (HBC) and East Sussex County Council (ESCC) amid frantic concern for property and risk to life, as the path connecting Old Roar Road with Ghyllside Avenue is a popular cut-through. HBC workmen arrived the following morning to close it.

The landslide continued, and by the Thursday afternoon (15 February) several metres of earth from the gardens behind 24 Foxcote and

7 Penhurst Close had collapsed into the Gill, with a steady stream of water running between the two properties accelerating the land slippage. The water was coming from a manhole and Southern Water were alerted to their possible responsibility.

Despite the call being given a Category 1 priority, water continued to pour from the manhole and by the weekend (17/18 February) up to 15 metres of land had collapsed into

the Gill with an entire line of trees washed away.

In desperation, residents cleared their sheds and garden furniture as the land slippage drew ever nearer to their houses. They were in the meantime informed that their home insurance policies would not cover the damage and would only be activated if the main buildings were affected.

For them, worse was to come. An emergency response **2 →**



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EDITOR'S NOTE

In our lead story, a calamitous combination of climate change-driven extreme weather and public infrastructure neglect has resulted in residents abutting Old Roar Gill being made (hopefully temporarily) homeless. As if the recent St Leonards landslips, repeated town centre flooding and a seashore suffused in sewage with no salvation in sight weren't enough.

Also in HIP's News pages, and a reminder that the town sits amidst acres of Sussex countryside, a disturbing story about attacks on peacefully protesting hunt saboteurs.

In the Community section, there's a preview of planned celebrations of International Women's Day, and a call to help actively assist in protecting our environment, featuring frequent HIP contributor and wildlife photographer, David E P Dennis.

Elsewhere, our new education correspondent, fresh from the chalk face, examines the differences and tensions between local authority and academy schools. Just who exactly is in charge?

In a busy Arts section, you'll find news of an unusual art exhibition in St Andrews Mews and news of the 2024 Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition.

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News



extended to over 25 metres with more trees washed away and others left standing precariously, with HBC workmen unwilling to cut them down because, residents claimed, it would be too dangerous for them to do so.

After almost two weeks of dealing with what they considered to be unresponsive and distant units within HBC, ESCC and Southern Water, the residents felt totally abandoned. In desperation they contacted Sally-Ann Hart, MP for Hastings and Rye, calling on her to intervene on their behalf. However, the MP's secretary informed them that there was nothing Mrs Hart could do to help and suggested they contact their local ward councillors for support.

Tipping Point

According to Government figures issued by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), there were 1,555 recorded incidents of illegal dumping across the town of Hastings in 2023, a 171% increase over the previous year. We're not alone. There were over one million recorded incidents across the country, and it is believed this is likely to be an underestimate because of low reporting levels.

The illegal dumping of both domestic and commercial waste is a very profitable business. In 2018 a Defra review concluded that many of those involved in fly-tipping were also involved in organised criminality, with few convictions to deter the practice. Last year in Hastings, for example, not one of the reported fly-tipping incidents resulted in a successful criminal prosecution: the borough council (HBC) issued just two fixed-penalty notices, neither of which was paid.

Councils do have strong powers to tackle fly-tipping. On-the-spot fines of up to £1,000 can be levied. Courts can impose unlimited fines; offenders can even be sent to prison. As is the case with the provision of other public services, however, local authorities simply do not have the resources to make a difference. HBC is a case in point. Budget cuts have resulted in less money to monitor the dumping of waste from vehicles, and the council is reliant on local residents reporting fly-tipping instances long after the perpetrators have left the scene. Nevertheless, they still have the responsibility for the sometimes dangerous and costly clean-up.

An HBC spokesperson told HIP that the council treats fly-tipping "very seriously" and "will prosecute anyone caught". It was also explained that councils cannot remove fly-tipped waste from private land.

In an effort to reduce the number, HBC does provide a bulky waste collection service for large items such as sofas, fridges and mattresses. This costs £35 per item, which compares favourably with the commercial rates offered by specialist operators such as LoveJunk, who are fully licensed and dispose of the waste responsibly. However, many may feel that, in a cost of living crisis, the £35 per item charge is simply too much. There are certainly a large number of abandoned old mattresses and sofas lying around town.

But LoveJunk company founder Jason Mohr believes the way to stop fly-tipping fast is simply to ban cash payments for all rubbish removal and to require waste collectors to show photo ID and a waste carrier licence before a pickup. "The Government urgently needs to change the law," he said.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Dr Hiteva's family have been forced to leave their Foxcote home and they have no idea when, if ever, they will return. The emotional impact on the family is "impossible to convey", she says. "We cannot imagine having to find a new home at such short notice".

Her neighbour, Rebecca Fellows, a perioperative nurse, says she has been similarly affected by the traumatic event. She has been forced to take time off as she is in no fit state to work in such a demanding environment as an operating theatre. She says she feels abandoned by HBC, Southern Water and Mrs Hart. Were it not for her sister living locally she would be homeless.

Mark Clusker and his family have lived in their home for the last 13 years but have spent the last two weeks stoically clearing their possessions. With his insurance policy up for renewal in March he has no idea how he will be covered, given that his insurance company will only pay up if his house is damaged and not for any remedial works needed to the garden area along the Gill. He believes the lack of proactive action by HBC to minimise the landslide and to strengthen the banks of the Gill will mean that more properties are inevitably going to be affected and more people will live in fear every time it rains.

Dr Hiteva, who is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Sussex specialising in infrastructure and energy governance, business models, innovation and low-carbon transition, believes the landslide is connected to changing weather patterns and she warns that there are likely to be many more such incidents in the future.

Indeed, there have already been several land slippages across Hastings and St Leonards in recent months. In November, properties between West Hill Road and the Marina were evacuated after part of the cliff collapsed and, as HIP was going to press, another landslide has occurred at Caves Road. Once again local residents have been instructed to leave their homes with no certainty as to when they will be allowed to return.

team from HBC reported that their preliminary geological survey had identified that the slippage had occurred from privately owned land above the Gill and as such "the council cannot act further in this matter."

This opinion has been challenged by two local residents with expertise in structural and geotechnical engineering. They assessed that the slippage had started on the banks of the Old Roar Gill, on land owned by HBC. They identified a number of causes, including drainage issues from a backed-up or broken groundwater pipe; the general erosion of pipe infrastructure in the area, and the heavily vegetated Gill slope

linked to ongoing poor management of the Gill.

ORDERED TO LEAVE

As the landslide continued to creep ever closer to the homes, HBC's Housing Renewal team served residents in Foxcote and Penhurst Close with Emergency Prohibition Orders ordering them to leave their properties with immediate effect. The orders stated that, as the landslide had occurred on private land, the lifting of the order would be possible only after the residents themselves had carried out the remedial work needed to strengthen the stability of their homes.

By 24 February the landslide had



Sorry, tides are on holiday this week

New Year Assault on Hunt Sabs: Police Still Seeking Culprits

RICHARD PRICE

In a shocking incident captured on video, a group of four masked assailants targeted a broken-down car, smashing its windows and threatening the terrified occupants. The attack unfolded on New Year's Day in the car park of All Saints Church in Herstmonceux, where the victims, who are acknowledged hunt saboteurs, had arrived in their car with a view to preventing the South Downs and Eridge Hunt from killing foxes.

Nearly two months on, Sussex police are still apparently seeking assistance in identifying the attackers.

The victims of the assault included 65-year-old Hastings resident Simon Medhurst, who was in the driver's seat, along with two women, Mandy aged 68 and Anne, 55. Simon could not drive away because the car had a flat tyre, propped against its side.

The attackers, dressed almost identically and assumed by the victims to be hunt supporters, unleashed a barrage of threats, shouting they would kill and stab the occupants. They violently attempted to break into the car, ultimately wielding the tyre to smash windows, endangering Simon's life as they focused their aggression on him. Simon filmed them until a window was smashed, using a small camera which he dropped into the footwell.

HORRIFYING ORDEAL

On interview, Mandy described the attack, highlighting the assailants' efforts to seize her belongings and inflict physical harm on all three victims. Simon, recognizing the potential danger of being dragged



from the vehicle, clung to the steering wheel to prevent further harm.

Mandy said, "It was horrific. Absolutely terrifying. I literally I thought we were gonna die". She described the attack: "They ripped the body cam off of me. They ripped my handbag which was around my

neck, pulling it so hard that the strap broke. I was really bruised from it. They were repeatedly trying to grab my phone. Simon was being punched in the head and, I think, the top of his chest. They were going to try and pull him out of the car. Anne suffered bruising as she tried



to put her hands between the punches and Simon's head.

"They smashed nearly all the windows. They were trying to undo the locks and pull him out. And they said they were gonna stab him."

Simon, who is a disabled RAF veteran, knew that if he was dragged from the car he could be seriously injured or killed, so he hung onto the steering wheel. But as the blows rained down upon him with each blow he was becoming weaker. He said, "I decided that all I could do was hold onto the steering wheel because, if they dragged me out of the vehicle, they could start kicking me whereas all I was taking at that point was punches. Punches are painful, but punches are just punches, being kicked is a lot worse than being punched. I knew that I just had to stay in the vehicle."

The attack concluded when a security guard, intervened and chased off the assailants. Paramedics insisted that Simon attend hospital to be checked over. His injuries included a cut above his eye and bruised ribs.

"ILLEGAL ACTIVITY"

Simon said, "We knew the hunt was an illegal activity because they had terrier men on quad bikes with terriers in boxes. They do that so that if a fox goes to earth, down either its own type of earth or a badger sett - which is more often than not - then they use the terriers to dig the fox out. If we see them with terrier men, spades and terriers, they fully intend to kill a fox if they catch one."

He added, "I'd love to meet the security guard and thank him profusely for what he did. I think that he saved my life. I was about thirty seconds from losing my grip on the wheel".

Mandy said, "It has affected me quite badly. I was on a bus the other day and someone shut the window - when I heard a bang, my heart was racing. And the neighbours next door were recently tapping on something. Which is normal - but it reminded me of the thugs tapping on the window with the keys. It's like it just really turns your stomach with the anxiety".

Despite the trauma, the victims remain committed to their cause and say they returned to hunt saboteur activities on January 6.

POLICE INVESTIGATION

Sussex Police said last week that their investigation into the assault was "ongoing" and that they were pursuing "a number of lines of enquiry". But despite the video footage, which shows the face of one of the attackers as his mask slipped, no arrests have been made.

Asked whether the hunters' carriage of terriers on quad bikes was illegal, the spokesperson said: "It is not a criminal offence to carry a dog on a quad bike... But if any criminality is identified or reported, appropriate action will be taken".

No-one representing South Down and Eridge Hunt has been willing to speak to HIP, but a spokesperson told a BBC interviewer that the hunt had no association with the New Year's Day assailants.

Fox Hunting Law and Practice

The Hunting Act 2004 outlaws hunting of wild mammals, including foxes, with dogs. Not only the hunters themselves, but the owner of land they hunt on and the supplier of dogs for the hunt may be charged with criminal offences.

However, in an appeal case conducted in 2009, the Administrative Court held effectively that 'hunting' under the Act does not include the mere searching for an as yet unidentified wild mammal. It seems therefore that going to a meeting equipped with dogs from which a

fox hunt may ensue is not in itself illegal. Nor is the use of one or at most two dogs "to stalk and flush out" the fox, if it is then dispatched by immediate shooting.

'Trail hunting', under which hounds follow the scent of a fox or other wild mammal rather than a live one, is also legal. But what if the hunt starts in this way, but the dogs then pick up a live scent and chase after it? Prosecution will only be successful if the hunters can be shown to have been aware and had the opportunity to stop them.

SABOTAGE TACTICS

Hunt saboteurs - 'sabs', who have no qualms in identifying themselves as such - set out to disrupt hunting. Their main tactic is to confuse the hounds by making the same noises as are made by the hunters' calls. The sabs blow bugles and sometimes put citronella down if there's a pursuit going on. If a fox is trying to escape the hounds and crosses the path of the sabs, they will crack a whip because its use can divert the chasing pack the wrong way.

From the sabs' point of view, the hunters' treatment of the hounds is a further aggravation. According to Rowan Hughes of the Hunt Saboteurs Association, they are kept in cages and are not treated like pets because they have to be aggressive enough to tear a fox to pieces. Once

a hound becomes older than five or six years it is killed. "They are a tool in the process, like a piece of machinery," she says. "They are kept so they're able to run well, similar to maintaining a vehicle that you want to do a good job. They're kept in kennels together. And if they're not very good at it, or they get too old and they're losing their speed, or if there are just more than are needed, then they're shot without any kind of compassion. If injured, they are not taken to a vet - that's not financially manageable."

Ms Hughes admits that hunt saboteurs sometimes trespass onto private land. That's because they're trying to save cruelty to an animal. From the sabs' perspective the illegality lies almost exclusively with the hunt. Hunters also commit trespass when chasing foxes, including

through people's gardens or nature reserves.

To her, the law seems "deliberately woolly", making prosecutions very difficult. Hunts are not really policed, which is partly why hunt saboteurs carry out monitoring. "We need a tightening of the law as soon as possible to make it a workable system that effectively stops hunting," she argues. "Until then, hunters will continue to break the law and we will continue to try to stop them. But whatever the legal status of hunting, we will oppose it, campaign against it, and directly intervene wherever possible to save lives."

The South Downs and Eridge Hunt was approached via its website for comment both on its general practice and on the events of New Year's Day at Herstmonceux, but has not responded.

DAVE YOUNG



My Child Abducted

GEORGIA DRAKE

As a parent, you assume and take comfort in the fact that if your child was abducted suddenly and permanently without permission, they would be returned immediately with the support of the police and children's services. Sadly, you would be wrong.

This is a story – an ongoing story – of child abduction. My child. I am writing it for publication, not because I want to influence the court which may eventually determine its outcome, but to inform other parents in East Sussex how little help or concern they may receive in

such circumstances.

My son H is aged four. He is autistic. He finds any changes to routines extremely difficult to cope with.

His biological father was briefly my husband. We separated six months after H's birth: H stayed with me, my husband left, and stayed away for two and a years without seeing him. We got divorced by a mutual online process, and lived wholly separate lives.

My now ex-husband re-surfaced with a new partner last October (2023) and asked to see H on a regular basis. He has a concerning past history characterised by drug-taking and violence. Nevertheless it seemed like he had good intentions, and we gradually introduced a re-

gime under which I would take H to visit him and his partner on a Wednesday afternoon and leave them together for four hours before he was returned.

On 31 January I took H for his Wednesday visit. In the evening I received a message from his father that he would not be brought back. It was suggested that I was an "unfit mother". There was no further communication.

'EMERGENCY'

I immediately phoned the SPoA (Single Point of Advice) office within the Children and Families department of East Sussex County Council, which has an emergency line. I also phoned Sussex Police. I pointed out to both that H is autistic, that he would be seriously distressed at being separated from me, and that his father was not equipped to care for him. Both the social worker and the police officer that I spoke to said that they would not get involved without a court order. I would have to go on the gov.uk website to make an application. No help was offered to me to do this.

I found that that there was an "emergency 48-hour child arrangements order" for which I could apply. I made the application the next day to the Hastings Family Court. I had some trouble in gathering all the necessary documents (such as proof of ID) but was eventually told my application had been accepted and would be "processed".

I also contacted solicitors who might act for me under legal aid – I have no means to pay privately. They said that legal aid should be available to me for an emergency hearing, but that the court would first have to determine that it was an emergency and set a date for hearing.

COURT PROCESS

For the next three weeks I waited for the court to advance my application. I phoned daily to the Hastings court receptionist who told me each day that the application was still pending. It took me nearly three weeks to find out that it had been approved for an emergency hearing and transferred to the Brighton Family Court – but at the time of writing this (last weekend) I was still waiting for a hearing date. A spokesperson at Brighton has told me that waits for "emergency" child hearings can take up to 17 weeks.

In the meantime H has not attended doctors' appointments and dentists' appointments, nor attended nursery in almost a month. He has also not seen me, his mother and carer, or any of his friends or family members here. After two weeks I went round to my ex-husband's flat with my current partner in order to give my son a Valentines Day gift. My ex-husband violently assaulted my partner in the street, kicking him on the ground with steel toecaps. I

reported this to a police officer who dismissed the incident at the time as "a civil matter". I was later told that statements would be taken from myself and my partner, and a date was arranged for police to call round. I was then informed that they were too busy, and my interview would have to be re-scheduled.

After speaking to other grief-stricken parents, I have found I am not alone in feeling there is no pain greater than to be deprived of knowledge of your child's whereabouts or safety but knowing they are missing you. It is pure hopelessness, like staring into the abyss. It is bleak.

National charity Action against Abduction states: "Children can experience extreme trauma including emotional behavioural and social impact". The case studies on their website are truly harrowing.

I demand an answer from East Sussex Children's Services, our Sussex Police and the courts system as to how an abduction like this can be treated with such lack of consideration or concern.



Fire Station Reprieve

At a meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority on 8 February, it was determined that the provision of full-time fire engines at The Ridge Community Fire Station will be maintained. Earlier proposals to change the current shift system to day crews only, which would have left the station unable to offer night-time cover, have been shelved. It was calculated that the resulting increased overtime payments would have swallowed up any cost savings.

Prospective Labour party candidate for the Hastings & Rye constituency Helena Dollimore, who has

been campaigning for retention of full capacity at The Ridge, claimed this decision as a victory. She was quoted on the SussexWorld website: "I am pleased that these dangerous proposals to downgrade The Ridge Fire Station have been dropped for now, and I want to thank everyone in the community who joined our campaign with local firefighters by signing the petition or attending one of my public meetings."

A proposal to place a third fire engine at the Bohemia Road station was, however, also withdrawn as being "no longer financially viable".

Ice Creams but no Café

Hastings Borough Council have been inviting 'Expressions of Interest' to operate an ice cream concession from a fixed location outside the West Hill café for the 2024 season. Prospective operators must already hold a current FHRS (Food Hygiene Rating Scheme) rating. Bids close today (Friday).

The café itself will not be reopened. A council spokesperson said last week: "We have decided that it would not be feasible to explore any short-term options due to the condition of the building." The site is earmarked in the long term for redevelopment as an Interpretation Centre for Hastings Castle.

HASTINGS IS NO PLACE FOR HATE

Find out how your local services and other organisations are supporting the LGBT+ community against hate crime.

COMMUNITY INFO HUB

Hastings Town Hall

Station Road, TN34 1QR

Sat 9 March 2024

10am-4pm

FREE ENTRY

International Women's Day Festival Promises to be a Roaring Success

ERICA SMITH

Each year, Hastings Women's Voice hosts an International Women's Day event. Last year's festival in Stade Hall was such a success that it has outgrown the venue. This year, *Hear Me Roar... More!* will be held in the Hastings Observer Building on Saturday 9 March. The event runs from 11am to 7pm, ending with music by the uplifting SHE Choir and musicians Elisha Edwards and Kinsella. The event is free and everyone is welcome – it's a day to celebrate women of all kinds, both locally and across continents.

Women's Voice Chair, Anne-Marie Watson says: "We live in a town with so many inspirational, activist women, trans and non-binary folk, and this is a brilliant opportunity to get everyone together under the same roof. We are delighted that

organisations as diverse as Afri-Co-Lab, Trans Pride, Arts on Prescription and The Refugee Buddy Project will be part of *Hear Me Roar... More!* We want to showcase the amazing work being done by women and trans-led organisations in Hastings and St Leonards."

There will be stalls from women's organisations across the town including: Acorn Community Union, Black Butterfly, Change, Grow, Live, East Sussex Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence/ Abuse & VAWG Team, Education Futures Trust, Eggtooth, Hastings Rounders, Hastings Youth Commons, iRock, Oasis Project, The Refugee Buddy Project, Rainbow Alliance, St Michael's Hospice, Trans Pride, UNISON and the Wonky WI.

Activities for adults and children will be part of the day – you are invited to join in workshops including creative paper folding with Afri-Co-Lab, Kids Crafts with Arts on Prescription, yoga and wellbeing work-



Hear Me Roar in 2023

shops with Roots of Return and embroidery with Stitch TLC.

Multidisciplinary artist Anna Maria Nabirye will give a presentation about her co-created ongoing project *Up in Arms*. There will be spoken word from local poetry collective A Load of Poets and a chance to hear Brighton-based AFLO the Poet.

Anne-Marie reminds us that: "International Women's Day is a day of solidarity with women across the globe and we want to extend our

support and solidarity to all those who are abused, persecuted, starved and those who spend their lives trying to prevent this from happening."

There will be opportunities to hear from inspirational women who support and stand in solidarity with women from every community within our town and beyond, including: Emily Booth, a local resident with Palestinian heritage and Kate Colley, Chair of Hastings & District Palestine Solidarity Campaign; Cllr Julia Hilton, Leader of

Hastings Borough Council; Rossana Leal, CEO and founder of The Refugee Buddy Project and Elaine Ellis of UNISON.

Everyone is welcome to drop in or stay for the whole event. Anne-Marie says: "Women's Voice is always looking for more women to come join us and help develop projects and work on new events. Please come talk to us on the day about what's most important to you and what you'd like Women's Voice to do more of locally."



Filsham Reed Beds

Standing Up for Nature!

CHARMIAN KENNER explains how we can find out more about vital local environmental issues.

The Unite for Nature group is holding an event for everyone in the Hastings area who wants to protect our natural environment. Standing Up For Nature is on Saturday 2

March from 2-4pm at the Salvation Army Hall, 26 St Andrew's Square TN34 1SR. The meeting is free, with refreshments provided.

Hastings is a beautiful area with

coast and countryside close by. Climate change will affect its wildlife and landscape. Our speaker, David EP Dennis, Bexhill Town Council's Wild Domesday Project Manager, will be talking about the evaluation of wildlife and landscape assets and the threats to them. The talk, with slides, will highlight the three-year project covering Bexhill's nine wards and how the work being done there can help Hastings. The talk will include important information on rising sea levels, weather and climate, wildlife and marine protection, sewage pollution, dark skies, bathing water quality, plant, bird, insect, and mammal identification and recording, and the critical food-chain pathway.

The talk will also cover grant funding, protection of Galley Hill's rare bees, threats to ground-nesting birds and Combe Valley, Hastings Country Park and the many Hastings park and woodland areas. It will also look at the planning system and how to assess landscapes if developers wish to build on precious recreational or wildlife-rich areas. There will be an opportunity for questions.

There will also be short contributions from groups campaigning to save green spaces in Hastings, including local residents who oppose the current planning application to build 101 homes on the Horntye Sports Complex. As well as the loss of sports facilities in a central location, this would mean a loss of green space that is home to many small

mammals, birds and insects and is a bat foraging site. In addition, four active badger setts have been identified on the site, which would be temporarily or permanently affected by the development. Horntye Fields are alongside Summerfields Nature Reserve, which would become isolated amongst dense housing, significantly reducing habitat and impacting biodiversity.

The Save Sandrock Hall Bends campaign have also been invited to speak at the meeting. Their concern is to protect an area of ancient bluebell woodland and green space op-

posite Conquerors March on The Ridge from a potential development of 140 houses. This land is the last remaining part of a wildlife corridor linking the Sussex Weald to St Helen's Park woodlands, then to Alexandra Park and Hastings town centre.

The meeting will conclude with a discussion on how best to work together to protect and restore nature in Hastings. There are already many valuable initiatives to increase biodiversity in our local area, and we hope this event will help take them forward. Please come along and join in!



New Hastings-based group, Grieving for Gaza, performing a silent 'tableau vivant' in Hastings Town Centre on 23 February. The tableau expressed the shame and heartbreak felt by so many at the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

It's Reality, But Not As We Know It

HELEN MURPHY AND NICK PELLING go beyond mere reality.

At first glance, you wouldn't guess that the old Observer building, besieged as it is by rusty scaffolding, is home to an exciting almost futuristic space. But appearances are deceptive: the mezzanine floor in the building is now the 'Creative Tech-Hub' for Hastings Commons. We were drawn there on a cold Thursday night by a promise from the dynamic Irish artist, Ornagh, that she would explain to us old duffers how Extended Reality might be a way to make exciting and meaningful art.

JUST THE BEGINNING

ER, she clarified, is just the umbrella term for a whole range of image making and perceiving, via digital technology. So far, its uses have been dominated by the gaming world, but that is changing. Ornagh has thrown herself into exploring how the new technology can give artists new ways of seeing and understanding.

On this particular night, she was sharing some of her enthusiasm with an audience of creatives and inquisitive types from the Hastings artsy community. Although she has been engaging with the new modes for some time, she is also something of an evangelist, prophesying greater things to come. As she said slowly

but clearly at the end of the evening, "We are only at the beginning."

But, what are the attractions of dumping pencils and paint in favour of headsets and screens? Ornagh argued that first and foremost is the freedom to make imagery - moving or static - incredibly quickly. You are free of the humdrum constraints of the dreary, solid world. As she said, "If I want a line of dancers gyrating behind me, I can have it in quick time." (She also admitted, it's a great excuse to wear the special digi-dancing suit for the camera.) Fundamentally, new tech speeds up the time taken to realise an idea. And modification and re-thinking is also swift. And, on top of that, artworks are easily stored and re-shown over and over. And, possibly, even monetised repeatedly.

INTOXICATING POSSIBILITIES

However, although it is very easy to see that all these evolving electro realities - virtual, augmented, mixed and, of course, AI - might well be endlessly intoxicating, Ornagh remains first and foremost an artist with something to say. She is concerned with certain enduring things, such as the politics around



He Loves Me by Ornagh

the female body-image, consumerism, mental health and all the distortions and demands imposed on

younger people in today's society. In that sense, her raw material is embedded within what I suppose

we should call, real-reality. However clever is the medium, she still feels that art must aspire to generate questions that might prompt positive change.

The joy of digital technology, however, is that it escapes the familiar and brings surprises to the eye and mind. The oddness of the visual creations is taking us towards a new immersive surrealism. And yet it was also interesting to note that Ornagh still uses an actual scrapbook for a visual diary as a means of collecting and recording fleeting notions that might later be inspirations for work. Ornagh is, somehow, both traditional and at odds with tradition, simultaneously.

LET'S GET DIGITAL

She has, for example, produced a body of work that she calls *Ode to Him*, in which she looks for new visual ways to explore that most ancient of agonies: the broken heart. The corresponding *Ode to Her*, has brought her face to face with her existentially shifting self. Although this sort of work can induce body paranoia, she believes her work is ultimately about the "empowerment of women".

Whatever one's view on new-tech, Ornagh's work is undoubtedly intriguing and likely to become more so as it evolves. But she is also keen to encourage others to try new technology as a means of creating different art. She points out that there are several ER/worldbuilding software packages that can be downloaded for free, such as 'Unreal Engine'. The possibilities are seemingly endless. So much so that even us old duffers were excited.

For more information go to ornagh.com

The Chamber of Horrors

ELSPETH TIDDLYPUSH gives a personal view on the reasons for the malaise in local politics.

A Wednesday morning a few weeks ago in January, I decided to attend a meeting of Hastings Borough Council. As it turned out, I witnessed the spectacular shenanigans that constituted the political maelstrom and meltdown of the local Labour Party.

As we all know now, this has led to the creation of the so-called Hastings Independents and the election of Julia Hilton as Council leader. In some ways, this was what passed for high-octane, political drama, but to me it all seemed a bloodless, lack-lustre affair. Not because the implosion of our council isn't inter-

esting, but because the setting is so unspeakably drab.

The citadel of local power is known as Muriel Matters House. A carbuncle of a building that put me in mind of what I imagine Orwell's Ministry of Truth looks like. But with more windows. Almost invisible in its grey functionality.

The harsh blue and beige corporate-style entrance lobby is a delightful visual fusion of a Ryanair check-in desk and the reception of Crossroads Motel. Formica help desks are bathed in fluorescent white light. No one was there.

The main meeting point of a town council should really be the civic heart of the town. The sense of this being where important power is located should be some sort of 'wow' moment. But, this was not evident on Wednesday, nor, I suspect, on any day in the town calendar. To state the blindingly obvious, this building is dull. Spiritually dead. A place where sensible decisions go in order that they are never made.

On ascending to the first floor, aesthetically things got worse. The main debating chamber has view lines to the 'top table' obstructed by structural pillars. Assorted councillors, reporters, and members of the public were jumbled into confusing corners and dark recesses. When the speeches, announcements and debates commenced, it was dire. Those speaking came across as mumbling and inaudible - largely due to the poor acoustics and ineffective configuration of the room. Everyone looked strangely waxy under the white lighting. It was the Chamber of the Undead.

If this is our local democracy in action, it is embarrassing. Surely there must be a better venue.



And of course, there is. It is called the Town Hall: a grade II listed building and a marvellous example of Victorian Gothic Revivalism, designed by the esteemed Henry Ward. Fittingly, it was built for the purpose of giving Hastings Council a suitable home. It was also constructed with local materials with some terrific flourishes and details, such as decorative stonemasonry and stained glass windows. In short, it is the epitome of civic pride, from an age when such a phrase

meant something. It may be a little weathered here and there, but it has a soul.

Surely this building should be the heart of Hastings. Doubtless there are sensible reasons why this cannot be, such as Health and Safety or the all-purpose excuse of our times: there is no money.

We are, it seems, condemned to live in an age of decline. Or maybe it is my age. Perhaps, I should stop ranting. But what about St Mary in the Castle? Don't get me started....

Who Runs our Schools?

Our new education correspondent, CALLUM THOMSON, a former Hastings teacher, considers the debate between Academy and Local Authority schools.

Academies are state-funded, non-fee-paying schools which are independent of local authorities. Maintained schools are schools which receive funding and oversight from the local authority.

Nationally, academies make up 80% of secondary schools, 40% of primary schools and 44% of special schools. There is a similar picture in Hastings. Of 20 primary schools here, 15 are academies and five are maintained. Of the five secondary schools locally, four are academies. The three largest schools, all academies, Hastings Academy, Ark Alexandra Academy, and St Leonard's Academy, teach 95% of secondary school students in Hastings.

Some of the key differences between academies and maintained schools relate to their organisational structure at the top. Academies are run by 'trusts'. These are education charities which are funded directly by the Department for Education (DfE). There are two kinds: single-academy trusts – SATs, or multi-academy trusts – MATs. Nearly 90% of academies are run by MATs and, in 2022, the government set a date of 2030 for all schools to be part of, or in the process of joining, a MAT.

Multi-academy trusts are run by two groups: the members, and the board of trustees. The members' primary responsibility is to hold the trustees to account. Trustees have a more hands-on role, responsible for the legal, financial and strategic performance of the trust. The trustees then generally appoint a local governing body which, alongside the headteacher, is responsible for the day-to-day running of each school.

HASTINGS' ACADEMIES

Locally, Ark Alexandra Academy is part of the Ark Schools MAT, which runs 39 schools across the UK. Hastings and St Leonards Academies are part of the University of Brighton (UoB) MAT, which runs 15 schools.

Maintained schools are overseen by the local authority, which is responsible for performance and can intervene in their management and governance. Each school has a board of governors responsible for overseeing financial performance and appointing the headteacher. Significantly, the local authority

nominates a representative to sit on each governing board, giving it an active presence in individual schools, connecting residents of each community with the leadership of their schools.

The relationship between local government and academies is quite different. Although the government advises local authorities to seek positive relationships with academies, there is no statutory obligation for any link to exist. Where a local authority has concerns about academy performance, it must raise them directly with the national Department for Education.

Josh Smedley, former representative for the Teachers Union NASWAT at Ark Alexandra, says: "After academisation, humanity, community and collegiality are quite often replaced by cold, faceless hierarchies. Many decisions for Hastings' children are being taken by people based in London, Birmingham or Brighton who have no connection to or understanding of the town."

"Many decisions for Hastings' children are being taken by people based in London, Birmingham or Brighton who have no connection to or understanding of the town."

The argument for academies was that Local Authorities had become bogged down in bureaucracy and were slow to innovate. Academies would be in a position to empower the best and the brightest educators. As academies have a much greater say in the curriculum they teach and in pay and conditions for staff, they would be able to quickly implement the latest education research.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

There is of course the flip side to this absence of red tape – a lack of transparency and due process. A report by the House of Commons Public

Accounts Committee expressed concerns that academy trusts were "using public money to pay excessive salaries", noting the difference between the average annual salary of an academy headteacher (£92,000) and an LA maintained school headteacher (£88,000), and finding more than a hundred instances of trustees being employed on salaries in excess of £150,000, which they declared "unjustifiably high". The London School of Economics, in a separate report, noted that MAT accounts, while having to be signed off by an external auditor, "do not provide a

the power Regional Directors wield, saying this represents a massive centralisation of power to the DfE, via unelected civil servants who operate without public scrutiny or democratic oversight.

There is also a convincing accusation that, despite academies being created in order to empower headteachers and respond to bespoke local interests, actually, when part of a MAT, single academies are disempowered. As the MAT holds the agreement with the government, single academies within it are not free-standing legal entities and are beholden to orders from above.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

This raises the question of parental involvement and their inability to affect the practices of their schools. The government explicitly denies this. On their academies myth-busting.gov page, they say it is untrue that "academies won't be accountable to parents" and that they "want parents to be more involved in their child's education – not less". They continue: "Whereas one-size-fits-all approaches dictated from County Hall gives an impression of local control, in fact, it's academy headteachers and governing bodies that hold direct relationships with the parents they serve and have the power to be much more responsive to their communities."

The government says that they want to "enable academies to move from a model where parents are elected for means of representation, to one where they are chosen for their expertise". Again this follows their meritocratic reasoning that the best and the brightest should be in charge, not parents or councillors who may end up in an important leadership role by dint of legislation. But where maintained schools must, by law, have at least two par-

ents on the governing board, academies have no such obligation.

The debate between academies and maintained schools could be seen as a classic political division. To the left, councils provide a much needed democratic and community-oriented safeguard against mechanical, corporate management. To the right, councils are stodgy and prevent change.

The government insists academies are "empowering the frontline and moving control away from bureaucrats to improve school performance, holding them to account for the results they achieve, and to much stricter standards of financial propriety than we ever have with local authority schools."

EMPOWERING THE FRONTLINE

The ideological choice is between a large-scale, liberated, market-driven pursuit of school improvement. Or a system stewarded by local government, democratically accountable but with a slower and more deliberative, committee-driven process.

With MATs, the people in charge determine how the school is run. Yes, MATs are free to elect a governing board containing no parents, and make important decisions with no public consultation, but that does not necessarily mean they will. Successive governments have built an education system that relies on contrived market pressures to incentivise – or terrify – schools to improve. There seems little doubt that Ark is committed to improving their schools in Hastings. Equally true, I am sure, for UoB Academy Trust. Perhaps ultimately, the question transcends local specifics and reflects an age-old political division between state or market, regulation or choice, or even Left and Right.





Life with Nigel

Baxter

Look, ok, I know it's not supposed to be like this. But sometimes, as a dog, you just can't seem to bond with your owner. It may be their smell. It may be their stinginess with the kibble. Or, as in my case, it may be their politics. The situation wasn't helped when he brought in a puppy. Another Labrador, but yellow. Me, I'm a dog of colour as they say. So I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised that I was completely superseded in his affections.

I can't help thinking that he only got us as sort of 'trophy' dogs. You know. Man of the people; cloth cap; pint of beer, and pair of Labs. Of course we don't see much of him. He's too busy talking horlix on his GB News radio programme. And rushing round every other radio and TV studio, spouting about anything and everything – like how he's more popular than Rishi Sunak (not that that would be difficult) and that the Conservatives will choose him as their next leader. Which is a bit 'Richi' since he's not even a party member. Which brings me on to the matter in hand. You probably know that he recently bought a seaside pad in Lydd. Nice enough I suppose if you like living

next to a clapped-out nuclear reactor but, from what I can gather, he has his eye on a town a bit further along the coast. Yes, my loves: Hastings. Clearly he's got to ditch the Reform Party first. And get readmitted by the Tories. But that might not be too difficult if, as predicted, they get wiped out by Starmer at the election. Then the head-bangers on the right of the party who argue that Brexit has been a big success reckon they'll take over. And as Nige said, he'll "have to" eventually end up in the same party as Conservative MPs like Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg. Gosh. That's a thought. Somehow I feel they deserve each other.

Anyway the one minor stumbling block to Nige's Machiavellian machinations is the current Hastings incumbent, Sally-Ann Hartless. I'm not sure he's told her of his plans yet. But I'd advise her to watch out for a man in a cloth cap and cavalry twill trousers walking a pair of dogs on Hastings beach at low tide. One will be yellow and slaving over its master. The other will be black and following a few paces behind with a haughty but decidedly disdainful look above the whiskers. They say you can't choose your parents, but there's no doubt some have more luck than others when the cards are dealt out.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

✉ Letter

COMMONS TRANSPARENCY

It is a shame Oli Smith sent his letter to HIP (*Jess Steele: Questions to be Asked*) before the public meeting held by Hastings Commons Community Land Trust, because a lot of his questions were answered there. Oli is right that the web of organisations that make up the Hastings Commons is confusing, and that transparency over use of public funds is important, but his allegations about Jess's abuse of public money are both serious and unfounded. As the Finance and Investment lead for the Trust, Bob Thust described the network of organisations that make up the Hastings Commons – an organisation way bigger than its pioneering Chief Executive Officer, Jess Steele.

I first met Jess in 2004 when I was chair of the town centre community forum. She attended a community walk and was drawn to the White Rock area. When the pier closed in 2006, her input into Hastings Pier and White Rock Trust was essential in raising the funds which saved it. She is a 'social entrepreneur' who cares about buildings and the communities that live and work in them. Not from a monied background, she is undeniably successful at applying for public funds. Local projects she has been involved with have benefited the people of Hastings and St Leonards far more than those of SeaSpace/SeaChange, which have sucked up significant public funds and may well deserve a forensic accountant's eye.

In 2015 I was one of the first tenants in Rock House. I witnessed the 'phased redevelopment' – an innovative way to repurpose a semi-derelict building on a small budget. I also saw the chaos when private developers bought the OB next door.

I have just designed a book about the OB to mark its centenary. It covers the building's 60 years as a printworks, then 35 years of dereliction with 13 owners and multiple planning applications granted, including permission for demolition and to build a monstrous low-budget hotel. Without Jess, the OB would still be derelict – or worse, have been demolished – causing structural damage to surrounding buildings.

The final section covers the renovation of the OB, exploring self-renewing neighbourhoods and the 'ecosystem' of organisations working together. It even includes a list of the grants and loans awarded.

The book will be launched on 20 March. If anyone is interested in learning more about the history of the OB – and the more recent history of Hastings Commons – it is highly recommended reading.

Erica Smith

✉ From our website

HASTINGS COMMONS

Following your article: *Jess Steele, Community Entrepreneur* and subsequent comments, it is difficult to see how Hastings Commons is a worthwhile project to benefit the people of Hastings.

The Commons commercial and residential properties, in various stages of refurbishment and occupancy, comprise around 65,000 sq feet. Commercial rents in Hastings are around £15 psf. Across all the properties this would provide an annual income of nearly £1 million a year and a capital value of up to £12 million. However, some properties are incomplete and comprise good and poor space, so their value may only be around £7 million.

Apparently some £28 million has been raised in grants and gifts by the company Jericho Road to create and run Hastings Commons. Further explanation is required to show the rationale of turning £28 million of real money into a property portfolio worth just 25% of that. Is there any evidence of charitable or social benefits to the community to justify this difference?

Hastings Commons Network Ventures is owned equally by Jericho Road, Meanwhile Space and Hastings Commons. The aim is for the latter to take 100% control. For this it will need to generate sufficient income from rents and raise commercial finance to buy out the other two parties. Using the rough estimate of value, the Commoners would need to take out commercial loans to pay Jericho Road and Meanwhile Space more than £2 million each. This is on top of fees and income they have already had throughout the protracted development process.

Jess Steele said "Some find it so hard to believe that people might do things that aren't just for them-

selves" – on these figures there is an understandable concern. Why is it that £28 million of grants and gifts enables the Hastings Commons to own a portfolio of properties with a net value of just £2.3 million and saddled with additional commercial debt, just so the original facilitators can be paid out a similar amount each?

From the website.

Name and address supplied

✉ Letter

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In response to my article in HIP 244 *Suppressing Dissent* you published a letter from a Labour Party member Mike Southon.

He had lived and worked outside the borough for many years and recently re-emerged in order to secure a prospective councillor position in my own ward, Maze Hill. He asked me, as a former party member, to support him, but now attacks me for wanting to vote Independent in local elections. He also criticises me for wearing 'rosie' coloured spectacles because of Neil Kinnock's position on the 1984 miner's strike.

He misunderstands. I was under no illusions in 1984 when, with fellow press officer Monica Foot, I surreptitiously collected money and food for the miners' families. My cynicism about the Labour leadership was reinforced when I had to introduce Neil Kinnock and Arthur Scargill together on a stage in front of journalists: they refused to speak to each other and would not even shake hands. Ten years before joining the Labour Party Press Office, during the 1972 strike, I made such good friends with Kent miners that they invited me to go down Betteshanger Colliery in Kent.

That was something to tell my uncle Sam Hartshorn about. Sam, a former miner in Chesterfield, was married to my aunt Alice Brocklehurst. Sam had been lauded for managing to save some of his mates during the terrible Markham Colliery disaster in 1938 when 79 men lost their lives. Kinnock's betrayal of the miners is personal and something I will never forget, although I was fond of Kinnock's late wife Glenys, who had more integrity than most.

Rosie Brocklehurst

We would love to hear from you.

✉ letters@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk

📘 facebook.com/hastingsindependent

📷 instagram.com/hastingsindependent

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

DAVID KOHLER



Grapes of Rother

We suspect that many of our readers like a glass of wine - this is how it starts! CHRISTINE O'GARA shares her experience of grape-picking.

Bailey's Job Agency on Hastings seafront was looking for grape pickers for the short season in September, so I signed up. Along with my niece, Maria, I turned up at Bailey's at 6.30am to be matched up with a fellow picker with a car for the drive to Gusbourne's vineyard in Appledore. Friendly Bailey's staff Liz matched me and Maria with Parvan, a quiet bloke.

John Joe was put along with us, up front beside Parvan, with a map on his knee of where we were going. He talked the whole journey, telling Parvan how to drive: when to indicate and when not to and demanding he speed up. Parvan just looked at him blankly. Later I found out Parvan was from Sri Lanka, had only been in the country two months and could not speak English very well.

John Joe talked on, sharing his wisdom about the Ukraine war, Keir Starmer, Brexit, Tony Blair, Odessa, and magic mushrooms. He told us where to find them (two fields either side of the road near Winchelsea, it turned out). He also talked turkey, working via Bailey's last season "in a forensic suit and mask, up to my knees in blood, shit and feathers". The terrible reality of our Christmas dinner, I thought. He'd also once worked on the bins around Rye and described the lengths people go to to steal stuff from Paul McCartney's rubbish.

John Joe then directed Parvan through a no-through road and out

the other side and said straight-faced that he himself couldn't drive at the moment as he'd had his licence revoked! Somehow, I managed to keep a straight face too.

At the vineyard, Jim welcomed us and gave out hi-vis vests - different colours depending on your role. I was a picker, which was yellow. Bucket-runners wore yellow and pink, tractor trailer staff wore only pink and permanent staff were in orange. They also had green first aid kits in a pouch strapped around their waists, plus walkie-talkies. To add to this rainbow, we were given red snippers, black gloves and two yellow or black buckets.

There must have been 200 of us. We were led across the main road to start picking pinot noir grapes. A trailer containing eight Portaloos followed along behind us, plus another trailer with washing facilities - huge containers of water, bottles of soap, blue rolls of paper towels and bins for rubbish.

We were split into two groups - either with Dragos or Alex, both Romanian and permanent staff. The grapes were beautiful - small and compact, purple/black and so juicy. Maria and I worked together, either side of the same vine, picking our bay clean and then moving on to the next empty bay. I sang to myself: 'Never Mind', a poignant Nanci Griffith song about fruit-pickers working their way across the USA, starting with the grapes in California. How appropriate the lyrics were - "I

hear the grapes are falling from the vine." And they were - it seemed to me a bumper crop.

While we picked, bucket-runners removed our full buckets, replacing them with empty ones; trailer staff emptied the buckets into large plastic containers on the trailer, and the tractor moved slowly along as the trailer filled up.

It was a beautiful day, that first Sunday, if a little windy. Sometimes, we had to walk a long way in order to get to the particular vines they wanted us to pick. Once, we walked across a large empty field, the soil pale brown and stony beneath our feet. I looked back to watch my fellow pickers still trailing across. I was reminded of that scene in the film *Witness*, where everyone comes together to build a barn, only we were much more colourfully dressed.

One time I was behind three blokes, one of them was John Joe, plus Joe, a young lad into his boxing, and an older guy with an eyebrow piercing. They chatted away, the older guy about his time working all hours in the City, taking drugs, working hard and playing hard - and now being stuck in a village out here.

"Ah well," commiserated John Joe, "you've got all day for a wank!"

"I get someone to come in and do that for me!" the older guy replied and they all laughed, including me. It was like being stuck behind *The Inbetweeners*!

We were all ages, mostly older, some people in their 80s, a lot of retired and self-employed topping up their incomes. I met Christina, a make-up artist with no work at the time because of the writers' strike; Michael, an IT guy, who divorced his wife just before Covid and moved from London to St Leonards, then fell back in love with her in lockdown and they are now together again; Joe, the boxer; another lad who was a semi-professional cyclist; artist Helen; a fireman

eating together.

For my last day of picking, a Saturday, we worked late, until 5pm. Parvan and a fellow Sri Lankan pal of his wanted to get away quickly - as they had evening jobs to go to. I felt for them as I sat in the back of the car, tired and sticky, while their bosses rang them demanding to know where they were and why they were late. Parvan was working in a favourite restaurant of mine that very evening. Lucky me, who was just doing this for an extra bit of money and who could go home and put her feet up.

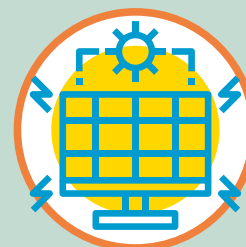
Now, when I open a bottle of red, I don't just think of those purple/black, juicy grapes, I think of yellow and pink, orange and green, and red and black: all the people wearing those colours. After the harvest, we had an email from Gusbourne's to say it had indeed been a bumper crop - the most they've ever picked at 490 tonnes. And they gave us a party one Thursday afternoon with wine (of course!), meat, cheese, olives, salad, crisps, chutney and bread. It was a great afternoon, topping what was overall a fun experience; I felt sad when it was over. Never mind; I can do it again next year.

christineogara@hotmail.com

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What's in the Air?

SARAH MILNE talks to Jude Montague about her graphic novel-in-progress

Jude Montague's talents are spread right across the local art and music scene. From musical performances with her partner, Matt Armstrong, to exhibitions of art prints, made in the couple's shop and studio in King's Road, Jude can almost always be found sharing her talents somewhere in town. One of her main projects this year is the publication of *What's in the Air?*, a graphic novel about her grandparents, Marjorie and Sydney, pioneers of early radio. Earlier this month, I was lucky enough to catch up with her.

"Telling this story is a lifelong project. I have always wanted to do a graphic novel about my grandfather and have started it many times. With two other graphic novels – this will be my third – it finally seems to have happened after many false starts.

BROADCASTING PIONEERS

'What's in the Air?' was the title of a column from the very first issue of the *Radio Times*, on the very first page. It sums up the sense of searching for something new, of listening out to a brave new world of connectivity through the magic of wireless transmission. It was published in September 1923.

"My story dates from 1922, when the first nationally-linked radio broadcasts in the UK were made by the proto-BBC, then called 2LO in London and 2ZY in Manchester. My story is set in Manchester. The London-centric nature of our society sometimes overlooks regional stories. Perhaps that is changing, but I would like to contribute to a shift of the historical lens.

"I have worked in many different forms, but I do enjoy illustration – painting figures and scenes with pen and ink and building a story bit by bit. My first graphic novel was a mixture of drawing and written memoir. I am addicted to drawing, so it gives me an excuse to let the story unfold through doing something I really enjoy. The characters take on a life of their own and you want to see them ex-

MATT ARMSTRONG



press themselves in different situations, sometimes humorously. I love the personalities' interaction."

DRAWING THE FAMILY

Jude's drawings are wonderfully expressive – stylised, simple and vibrant. She explains:

"There is a newspaper clipping saying that they met at the radio, at 2ZY. It says both were part of the story of radio right from the very beginning. My grandfather, a cellist, was one of a group of young performers and was a core member of the original music team, becoming Uncle Sydney on the children's shows. My grandmother was a tailor – what she was doing at 2ZY I probably won't ever know! I have imagined her, though, commenting on future fashion, as there are accounts of experts predicting trends in colour, cloth, and shape for the forthcoming year. There were many pioneer women in early radio, so her story serves as a lens through which I can focus on their contribution to this emerging media."

What's In the Air? celebrates Jude's family's role in the beginnings of radio. Having earlier investigated the beginnings of electronic amplification here, Jude is also turning her attention this year to the invention of TV by John Logie Baird, here in Hastings.

"As a media historian and archivist I am fascinated by periods of change, where new technologies are developed and people use them to tell stories. In those early times there are often no codified rules in place: individuals can break loose, make a difference, jump in where

angels fear to tread. I am fascinated by the impulse that leads people to work *independently*, chasing ideas and making them a practical reality. John Logie Baird loved the idea of being an 'inventor'. He styled himself accordingly, unafraid to cut a figure as an outsider, with his wavy shock of hair and his sandal-clad feet, even in winter."

Jude is promoting a 'Spirit of Invention' festival to celebrate John Logie Baird later this year, including an art exhibition at Electro Studios in St Leonards.

What's In the Air? should be completed by autumn. It's not her first, and she says it won't be her last.

"I enjoy the process – I expect my next one will continue to dig into my interest in media history and I think it may be set back in London. My PhD was on the pioneers of the British film industry before and during World War One, and there are some fascinating, little-known stories to tell."

What's In the Air? is currently available for pre-order on Kickstarter at kickstarter.com/projects/isleofdogs/sydney-radio-pioneer-manchester-graphic-novel. Jude's first graphic novel, *Love on the Isle of Dogs*, is distributed through Central Books. Her second, *Breakfast in Shoreditch*, is available from Montague Armstrong at 15 Kings Road, St Leonards. This third novel will also be distributed through Central Books.

Jude will be running workshops on telling life stories through drawing, at Bus Stop Studios, 53 London Road. Register your interest at busstopstudios.com/classes

Treading the Boards at The Stables

STUART BAILLIE

In the coming months I'm going to be writing about The Stables – Hastings' vibrant and exciting theatre and art gallery down in The Bourne.

This won't just be another '...and next week you can see...' preview and review column. What I hope to explain is the breadth and depth of what is not just a thriving theatre but also an art gallery, with quirky exhibitions from a range of artists, and in addition a meeting place for community groups.

Like many others, we'd driven past the theatre so many times thinking, "we must go there." but never did. Then I met Stables' Chairman Neil Sellman, and his infectious enthusiasm drew me in. Neil leads a team with passion for what they do, all of whom are volunteers; something that many believe gives the theatre its unique atmosphere.

The Stables opened in 1959 and HRH The Queen Mother opened the new extension in 1979. While some of the biggest names in theatre and entertainment have appeared on its stage, treading those boards week in, week out are local people for whom performing is a passion. The Stables has a reputation for the quality of its productions: that's not just down to those we see on stage,

but there's also a technical team working with directors designing and building sets, working out the lighting design and crafting the sound, which might be 'background' music or something more technical – special effects, for example, that need to be delivered with absolute precision alongside an actor's dialogue.

Every weekend, and most evenings, you'll find the teams for upcoming shows learning lines, rehearsing and working with the technical team and all the backroom workers without whose input the magic could not happen.

In the last month I've been spending time with those involved in this month's 60th anniversary run of Joe Orton's sexy and subversive *Entertaining Mr Sloane*. I've sat in with the team putting together Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, and been there at the first meeting where *Every Brilliant Thing* was being discussed. It is casting in March and will take to the stage in May.

So I hope the prospect of this column excites you as much as it does me, as we explore all that needs to be considered when planning a show. Now I just need to check where I've put my tickets for tonight's performance of *Harvest* – I'll tell you how that went next time.

stablestheatre.co.uk



COURTESY OF THE STABLES THEATRE



Markus Thonett with Infinity Rail Track

4 Rooms - Plus

SARAH MILNE on Markus Thonett's new exhibition at St Andrews Mews

The secret rooms of St Andrew's Mews, mysterious decaying grandeur found upstairs during renovations, have become a popular and inspirational place for local artists. Some choose to use the twelve rooms to exhibit retrospective collections, others make work inspired by the timeless, ghostly space. Markus Thonett treats us to both in his *4 Rooms - Plus* show, open until the end of February. His original plan was a simple show of existing work in four rooms. But a cancellation in the other rooms gave him the space to make some new installations in response to the space, designed to reflect the visual and atmospheric feel of each room.

The show reflects Thonett's wide breadth of practice and ability as a mixed media artist. There are cardcuts of local scenes, creations from found objects, sculpted cast concrete, and burnt wood and mirror installations, including a fascinating 'infinity' rail track. Markus is a thematic artist, exploring the best way to feel and communicate a subject rather than limiting himself to one practice. This is a large and impressive collection of work made over many years.

CONVERSATIONS: FAMILIAR AND NEW

Some of this work was comfortably familiar, created in an artistic expression I have come to know and love. Other pieces almost felt as though they were made by a different artist. It was exciting and refreshing to see an artist so open to

developing and growing through new ideas. "My work is an ongoing conversation" he told me, "and like conversations between people, it jumps around different subjects."

Being alive, experiencing the fine balance between pain and joy, is a recurrent theme. Markus finds this especially poignant in the current turbulent times. Walking through the exhibition is a journey through that balance of pain and delight. Along with big conceptual ideas, there are other pieces that are pure playfulness. He loves to elicit new ways of looking at the ordinary. Recycling, reusing, and refiguring ordinary material, he invites his audience to see everyday objects with a fresh and surprising perspective, learning something new about themselves and their place in the world.

Thonett is a unique artist, both in his solo work and in the collaborative pieces he makes with Tessa, his wife and close colleague. The pair have become pillars of the local art scene, often curating exhibitions and collections and encouraging artists at all stages of their careers. Tessa is to be acknowledged for helping Markus curate this exhibition. I can't help wondering what is next for this power couple, and I doubt we will have to wait long to find out.

4 Rooms-Plus is upstairs at St Andrews Mews until the end of February. Markus Thonett will be making art there most Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

Virtual Storytelling

Over the summer of 2023, MSL led people in Hastings and Medway on a detective hunt, delving into the towns' archives and interviewing residents to find out about the past and the lives of working people to create two digital arts and heritage projects. VICTORIA KINGHAM looks at the development of this immersive exhibition.



Margaret Sheehy

headset and were transported by the memories. The exhibition included *The Song of Shadows*, a film by local filmmaker Rebecca Marshall. It also drew on the innovative and wonderful adaptation of Tressell's book as a graphic novel by Scarlett and Sophie Rickard, and included evocative sound pieces by Mary Hooper and Aram Zarikian and a moving installation by Susie Warren. Due to public demand, it was shown again in December 2023.

DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION

Artist Adam Glen has now employed a blend of photogrammetry and 3D modelling to recreate the experience as a digital exhibition. Glen reconstructed the location from multiple scans of objects, rebuilding the walls and roof. Subsequently, he incorporated lights to replicate the exhibition's ambience. This meticulous process has yielded a high-definition recreation of the location, now available online – details at the end of this article.

THE BIG ART OF BEACH OF DREAMS

Sheehy's next project, due for enactment in 2025, is already under way. It will be *Beach of Dreams*, a huge country-wide celebration of the UK coastline. And it will start in this area with our very own stretch of coastline. "We'll be creating big art, making mischief, gathering communities and telling stories between Dungeness and Bulverhythe," says Sheehy. It will be an unprecedented partnership of organisations across the UK and the Republic of Ireland, bringing residents together with artists, scientists and other communities to explore, together, the ever-changing coastline through music, writing, art, theatre and other activities.

The fully-realised recreation of 'Tressell's Children' can be found online at mslprojects.co.uk/tressells-children. The Rickards' beautiful graphic novel is available at the Hastings Book Shop, by order at Waterstones, and (of course) at Amazon. More details of MSL, past and upcoming projects, can be found at mslprojects.co.uk.



Viewing Tressell's Children

Margaret Sheehy is the powerhouse behind MSL, an organisation (billed as a theatre company, but actually much more than that) behind many ambitious national and international community involvement projects. Their aim, she says, is simply to tell stories. Each project is different, but many other organisations are involved, with funding, administration, staging, creation, publicity, final enactment. She is tireless in her determination to amass resources, to involve people, to create and recreate stories within history, culture, drama.

TRESSSELL'S CHILDREN

In Hastings, Tressell's Children was a ground-breaking project inspired by Robert Tressell's well-known semi-autobiographical novel, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*,

which depicts working-class experience in the very early 20th century and was written while Tressell (born Robert Noonan in Dublin, Ireland) lived in Hastings. It grew out of a 1985 oral history project that had recorded stories of those who lived here between the First and Second World Wars. Over the summer of 2023, workshop participants revisited and explored these largely unknown stories of the town's people, alongside professional artists and historians. They found new ways of telling their tales and gave old voices new life in the form of writing, graphic and digital art.

Their activities culminated in a gloriously immersive late summer exhibition and VR experience at the recently-uncovered Beyond The Door gallery in St Andrews Mews. Visitors were invited to put on a



Competition judges Vanessa Latache (Artistic Director) and Pascal Escande (centre)

Concerto Competition

VICTORIA KINGHAM at the inception of the 2024 Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition

With a splendid reception at the White Rock Hotel last Wednesday week, it was the start of a taxing few days for most of the competitors in the Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition. From its modest beginnings, the competition has grown in size and importance and is now internationally significant, attracting some of the finest pianists from forty different countries. The average age range of the competitors is about 25. From almost 250 applicants, 40 have been chosen to compete. They will be playing some of the most challenging piano works, concertos ranging from Mozart through to Scriabin and Prokofiev.

Mozart's piano concertos are mostly very well known, of course. But the challenge, as I heard from one of the judges, is to play them perfectly, as any fluffs or holes are instantly recognisable within their stately and open structure. But the complexity and depth of the music of Scriabin, for example, presents a different challenge. Each competitor's program is different, which clearly makes the judges' job extremely difficult.

Steinway & Sons, one of the major

sponsors of the competition, delivered two 9-foot Model D grand pianos to the White Rock Theatre in preparation for the competition. Six more grand pianos have been installed in the White Rock Hotel next door, for rehearsals. The competition began on Thursday 22 February and continues until Saturday 2 March, when five finalists will compete for a first prize that has the potential to greatly enhance their career as a concert pianist. All rounds take place at the White Rock Theatre, and will be streamed live for a worldwide audience via the website.

Tickets for the two finals on Friday 1 and Saturday 2 March are now sold out. The second final will include performances by two of the finalists and by the 2022 winner, Shunta Morimoto, who will perform while the judges are busy choosing their winner. Tickets for Stages One and Two were free, thanks to the generous support of the Isabel Blackman Foundation.

The Southbank Sinfonia – a chamber orchestra that is formed anew each year by recruiting 33 promising music graduates – will accompany the semi-finalists in the classical

concertos they choose, and the full forces of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra will play once again for the five finalists. Both rounds will be conducted by Rory Macdonald.

Local pianists who don't happen to be world-class artists have also participated via the competition's Music in the Meadow programme. A Bechstein grand piano was situated in the Priory Meadow shopping centre from Thursday 22 February to Sunday 25 February. Further details: hastingsinternationalpiano.org Facebook: [@hastingsconcertocompetition](https://www.facebook.com/hastingsconcertocompetition) Instagram: [@hastingspianoconcerto](https://www.instagram.com/hastingspianoconcerto)



Jerry Bergonzi Quartet Return to Jazz Hastings

Jerry Bergonzi is becoming a regular fixture at Jazz Hastings. After two triumphant appearances in the last two years, this legendary American tenorist is back by popular demand. Bergonzi gained worldwide recognition while playing with the Dave Brubeck Quartet. His complex, assertive saxophone improvisations brought a contemporary element into Brubeck's established style.

Between 1973 and 1981, Bergonzi recorded nine albums with Brubeck. He has also performed and recorded with other major stars, among them Bill Evans, Paul Desmond, Dave Holland, Gerry Mulligan, Jack

DeJohnette, and Roy Haynes. He is renowned for his innovation, mastery, and integrity. In a long series of great reviews, he is credited for relentless drive, inner fire, awesome technique, elastic lyricism, rich resonance, and musical vision.

Bergonzi will be appearing, as last year, with Mark Hodgson on bass and Stephen Keogh on drums. Multi-talented, award-winning pianist Will Barry will feature on piano. Don't miss this: 6 March at Jazz Hastings, EHSAA, The Stade, 8.30pm.



DISC

DISC Dementia Support (Dementia Information & Support Courses CIC) are a Dementia Support Service based in St Leonards-on-sea, East Sussex.

All of the services we offer are free of charge for carers, including information courses, 1-1 support, referrals, events, facilitated support groups, carer well-being craft club, DISC Guides, Singing Down Memory Lane and more.

If you would like more information, get in touch!

www.discdementiasupport.org
admin@discdementiasupport.org
Louise: 07591251005



6th Birthday Party

Refreshments included

March 15th
12:30 pm - 2:30 pm

St Augustine's Church Hall,
Bexhill on Sea, TN39 3AZ



BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

One Fine Day

By Ian Marchant
Published by September
Publishing, rrp £12.99
REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

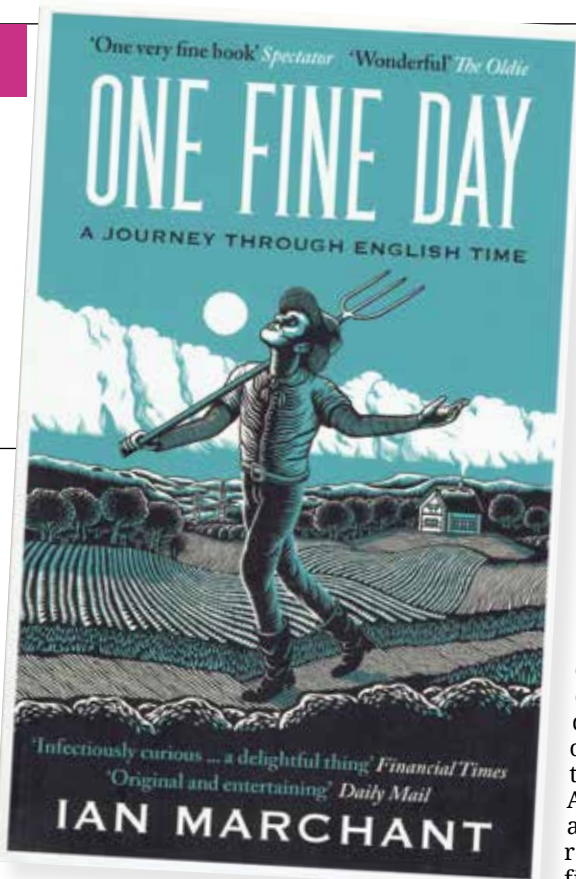
Ian Marchant, a regular presenter on ‘Open Country’, Radio 4, and diarist for Church Times, is dying. Side by side with his discovery of his soon-to-arrive demise, he delves into his family history. He is lucky to discover that he can trace it back a long way, to one Jean-Jacques de Marchant of Namur, Belgium 1435 to 1518, his 14x great great-grandfather!

More relevant to his book, and to us Sussex, and honorary-Sussex folk, his 12x great-great-grandfather was born here in the county, in Preston. His father worked in the iron trade, and probably fled Namur as war ripped through his country, with ironworks a military target. One of the most arresting passages in this fascinating book is a wee rant about Faragist attitudes to immigration and treatment of the Channel, ‘a road’, as ‘a barrier’. On a ‘points-based’ system, in the fifteenth century, the de Marchants would have scored highly and been invited in alongside many other refugee ironworkers.

SUSSEX WEALD IRONWORKS

Marchant offers a number of excellent and chatty historical info dumps throughout the book, and his ancestor’s trade allows him to give us a great picture of the history of ironworks, and of how the Sussex Weald evolved as a prime location for the industry.

He also drops in fascinating and



relevant insights into other areas of our history. His approach offers a commentary on our times and his own personal story, seen through the prism of a diary kept between 1714 and 1728. This was kept by his 7x great great-grandfather, Thomas Marchant. Throughout the book, Ian Marchant draws parallels not only with Thom’s times and ours, but more directly and personally, between his ancestor and himself, proving himself, too, to be a great diarist. The book moves across time, and his contemporary telling of, for example, February 22nd 2020 is matched to Thom’s diary entry for 22nd February 1720, though as the book goes on it is Thom and his century that gets the lion’s share albeit mostly as told, superbly, by Ian.

Thus, one of his history lessons for us involves the shift from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian – we moved to the latter in England in 1752, so Thom’s calendar is in fact eleven days adrift from ours today. Thus, the twelfth of May today was by Thom’s calendar May 1st. This gives us the delicious observation, after noting the arrival of martins

and swallows, of blooming bluebells and apple-trees, that ‘much of the old weather lore, and therefore the traditional farming year, is eleven days out’ – his May Day and ours occur at different times.

ROOTS OF THE LEWES BONFIRE

Other threads gives us the evolution of ‘clock-time’; the history of underpants and hygiene (you had to be there), and flax (also, it turns out, about... underpants); the history of ‘natural history’ at Hurstpierpoint; the odd eighteenth-century taxes on windows and candles, and the collection of taxes; the church in the eighteenth century, Anglican, but Catholic and Dissenter too; the roots of the Lewes Bonfire; literacy and vernacular Bibles; the position of the ‘yeoman’ in society; a good deal on dung and dirt; some interesting suppositions regarding ‘the Great Pretender’ and Jacobite intrigue; not to mention folk song...

And, too, the role played by a previous owner of Thom’s estate, Little Park Farm at Albourne, in the English Civil War, and as a consequence a potted history of the restoration, then of William and Mary, and the very topical relevance of William’s Act of Settlement, and his 1689 Declaration of Rights. The latter, enacted by Parliament as our Bill of Rights is why such a fuss was made over Boris Johnson’s attempt to prorogue Parliament, why the Supreme Court far from ‘committing treason’ quite rightly found against him, and why, in turn, Boris committed treason against us, the people, by passing laws that now do allow proroguing by the office of the Prime Minister alongside other acts of treason that in effect make of England an executive sovereignty not a Parliamentary one in which our ‘chosen’ ‘representatives’ nominally enact ‘our’ will.

DESTRUCTION OF BRIGHTON IN THE GREAT STORM OF 1703

Another lesson is given on the thermometer, and its role in founding modern chemistry – of Christiaan Huygens he writes that ‘if you were odd enough to want to rank seventeenth-century scientists in order of importance, he’s always going to be in your top four, along with Newton, Descartes and Galileo’. This is placed in a chapter that is in part about climate change, through the lens of measurement of temperature. Thom’s life coincided with the later Frost Fairs, at the latter end of the Little Ice Age. Marchant notes that it was said during Covid that the UK experienced the biggest slump in 300 years, ‘none of them said what caused the massive hit 300 years ago, but actually, it was a weather event, the Great Frost of 1709’. He describes the hit food supply took as crops failed and prices exploded upwards, and the destruction of much of Brighton in the Great Storm of 1703.

‘Accurate temperature measurement, as well as making industrialisation possible, also shows that we’re doomed, unless... unless what?’... He quotes from Thomas Cranmer’s *Book of Common Prayer*, ‘In the midst of life, we are in death’. This quote resonates on several levels in this wonderfully engaging book, and clearly not simply because Marchant is dying, as he notes are we all, sooner or later, a fact he treats as just that, a matter-of-fact truth.

I thoroughly recommend this book. About a third of the way through, he says that he wishes he ‘could magic’ Thom’s wife, ‘Elizabeth’s diary into existence, the equivalent of Thom’s but about how the house rather than the farm was run’, and I wish he could, too, as I’m certain he’d create as wonderful a companion volume with it to this *One Fine Day*.

One Fine Day is available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road, Hastings TN34 1RE

POETRY CORNER

Eddie
BRIDGET GRIFFIN

Tiles mosaic
Stomach archaic
Sprightly glistening territorial eyes
A tongue that laps up. All the noise
Very scaled. Many pigments of brown
This artful dodger has a frown
Dancing jiving. Back and to
Like a Pokemon card.
He resembles you
Whipping his tail
Almost 15 cm long
No clothes needed in a metallic throng
Eddie is his name
Two years old
These eyes can sift pots of gold
Meal worms and rocket salad.
A little water is his pallet
This chap doesn’t use his hands to eat
Only his tongue is there to greet
‘I’m not in the body don’t you see
Just up in the heavens of family tree’
But I understand humans.
Whatever you may say
I’m fighting a battle to devour my prey
My teeth are razor sharp.
No need to forget
I’ll never be in need of your local vet.

Nature’s Philosophy
VICTOR TIMMONS

Nocturnal birds in sibilant causerie
Forest creatures in distant revelry
While nature’s blanket dims their rivalry
And stills the air to peaceful reverie

How brief is this tranquillity
As hostile meetings in darkened shrubbery
Remind, if only momentarily
That man alone enjoys in camaraderie

CROSSWORD CORNER

Across

- 1. Former stone on the radio to go beyond the limit (6)
- 3. Old-fashioned kidnap using universal abcde (6)
- 4. Unknown drug supporters and wild horses (6)

Down

- 1. Turned taser onto unknown inferior substitute (6)
- 2. Olympic competitors showing variety without end (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List

1					2
3					
4					

Wicked Leeks

In fact, Leeks were traditionally considered virtuous and were linked to St David (a teetotal vegetarian). So what could be better to cook right now as St David’s Day approaches?

It was once thought that sleeping with a leek placed under your pillow on St David’s Day would enable young girls to see their future husbands. Maybe not such a selling point these days, but leeks have plenty of other things to recommend them: high in fibre, good for the blood, and they keep colds at bay. They are also relatively cheap, versatile and sweeter than onions. Eat them roasted, poached, braised, or pan-fried – or try one of these delicious recipes from British Leeks.

VEGAN LEEK, COCONUT & CORIANDER THAI CURRY

Serves 2
Prep time: 5 mins
Cook time: 20 mins

- Ingredients:
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
 - 200g leeks
 - 1 heaped tbsp red Thai curry paste
 - 1 lemongrass stalk, lightly crushed
 - 2 lime leaves, torn
 - 50g mangetout
 - 50g baby corn, roughly chopped

- 1 x 400g can coconut milk
- 200g tinned peeled new potatoes, drained and halved
- Small bunch of fresh coriander, roughly chopped
- Long grain rice, to serve

Method:

1. Place a large pan on high heat and add 1 tbsp veg oil. Finely slice the dark leafy end of the leeks and fry on high heat for around 5 mins until bright green and crispy. Remove from the pan and leave to drain on a piece of kitchen towel.
2. Turn the heat down and add 1 tbsp of veg oil to the pan. Add the curry paste and stir for 2 mins until fragrant. Slice the rest of the leeks into 1cm rounds, add to the pan along with the lemongrass stalk and torn lime leaves, and stir well. Add 150ml water to the pan, stir again and cook for a further 5 mins.
3. Add the mangetout, chopped baby corn, coconut milk and new potatoes to the pan, stir well and simmer for 5 mins. To serve, add the rice to a bowl, top with the curry, then scatter over the crispy green leeks and chopped coriander.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRITISH LEEKS

ONE PAN CREAMY LEEKS, SALMON, & SPINACH

Serves 4
Prep time: 5 mins
Cook time: 30 mins

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 salmon fillets
- 2 large leeks, sliced into 1cm rounds
- 2 banana shallots, sliced
- 1 tbsp wholegrain mustard
- 1 tbsp dijon mustard
- 200ml double cream
- 100ml veg stock
- 2 tbsp dried tarragon
- 200g babyleaf spinach
- 1 x 500g can peeled new potatoes in water, drained and halved
- 1 x 30g bunch flat leaf parsley, finely chopped
- 1/2 lemon, zest and juice

Method:

1. Place a large pan on medium heat and add the olive oil. Season the salmon fillets well, then place skin-side down in the pan and fry for approx 7 mins, turning halfway through. Once cooked, remove from the pan and cover in foil to keep warm.
2. Keeping the pan on a medium heat, add the sliced leeks and shallots and cook for 10 mins until soft.
3. Stir in the mustards, then add the double cream, veg stock, dried tarragon and bring up to a simmer. Add the spinach and stir in until wilted, followed by the new potatoes, chopped parsley, and lemon zest and juice.
4. Check the sauce for seasoning, then place the salmon fillets back into the pan; cover and simmer for a further 5 mins until the salmon is piping hot. Serve immediately.

Cooking time: 35 mins

Ingredients:

- 2 leeks
- 4 large baked potatoes
- 2 tbsp crème fraiche
- 1 egg
- 150g frozen spinach
- Half a block of feta cheese
- 1 tsp spoon garlic granules

Method:

1. Finely slice 2 leeks, wash well in warm water, then soak in boiling water for at least 30 mins to soften.
2. Scoop out the insides from 4 baked potatoes and combine with 2 tbsp crème fraîche, 1 beaten egg, 150g frozen spinach (defrosted and squeezed out), half a block of feta, 1 tsp flaked sea salt, plenty of black pepper and 1 tsp garlic granules.
3. Add half the softened leek and mix well, then pile back inside the hollowed-out potatoes.
4. Mix the rest of the leeks with some olive oil and the rest of the feta. Pile on top of the filled potatoes and bake for 20 to 30 mins at approximately 200°C until lovely and brown.

Recipes by Matilda Bourne

TWICE BAKED POTATOES WITH LEEKS, SPINACH & FETA

Serves 4
Prep time: 45 mins

Recipe by Elly Curshen





South Saxons Mixed Team

HOCKEY

Tough Travelling

South Saxons Mens, Womens and Mixed teams were all in action over the weekend despite the desperately wet weather.

In South East Mens Division 1 (East), the Men's first team, captained by Lloyd Williams, travelled to Rochester to take on league leaders Old Williamsonians. Their hosts, who had won 14 and drawn one of their 16 league matches to date, were a class apart and won

8-0, leaving Saxons perilously placed in 10th position out of 12.

In South East Womens Division 1 (East), the Saxon Women, who were promoted from Martlets Division 1 last season, went to another high-flying side, Tunbridge Wells, and lost 4-0. Captain Caitlin Merison said: "Tunbridge were a well-drilled side. Unfortunately, we could not match our earlier season home performance of 1-1. We were

on the back foot and they came out strongly in the first half with three goals. Our second half performance was much better, but we were unable to pull the scoreline back."

At lower levels, the men's teams were more successful, with the seconds winning at Worthing while thirds and fourths both continue to head their respective divisions. So too does the women's second team.

Saxons Mixed Team competed in the England Hockey Tier 2 KO Championships on Sunday. An exciting and good-spirited away fixture against Eastbourne saw them level 1-1 at half-time, but they tired in the second half, and Eastbourne ran out 5-2 victors.

SOUTH EAST MEN'S DIVISION 1 EAST

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Old Williamsonians	17	15	1	1	79	24	55	46
2	Eastbourne 1	17	14	1	2	62	26	36	43
3	Folkestone Optimist 1	17	11	3	3	60	33	27	36
4	Gore Court 1	17	8	3	6	45	39	6	27
5	Canterbury Pilgrims	17	9	0	8	54	62	-8	27
6	Maldstone 1	16	8	2	6	49	45	4	26
7	Holcombe 3	17	7	1	9	32	42	-10	22
8	Ashford (Kent) 1	17	6	2	9	53	52	1	20
9	Burnt Ash (Bexley) 1	17	6	2	9	36	50	-14	20
10	South Saxons 1	17	4	0	13	29	59	-30	12
11	Cliffonville 1	16	3	0	13	23	57	-34	9
12	Herne Bay 1	17	2	1	14	35	68	-33	7

SOUTH EAST WOMEN'S DIVISION 1 EAST

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Holcombe 2	17	15	1	1	71	16	55	46
2	Canterbury 2	17	13	3	1	48	18	30	42
3	Marden Russets 1	17	11	3	3	45	16	29	36
4	Tunbridge Wells 1	17	11	2	4	53	18	35	35
5	Sevenoaks 3	17	9	2	6	40	28	12	29
6	Blackheath & Elthamians W1	17	8	1	8	35	23	12	25
7	Canterbury 3	17	7	0	10	17	34	-17	21
8	Ashford (Kent) 1	17	6	2	9	19	24	-5	20
9	Sevenoaks Acorns	17	5	2	10	21	50	-29	17
10	Folkestone Optimist 2	17	5	1	11	20	38	-18	16
11	South Saxons 1	17	2	3	12	20	47	-27	9
12	Bexleyheath & Belvedere 1	17	0	0	17	5	82	-77	0

HOCKEY

Saxons Honour Sophie Ford

Eighteen year old Sophie Ford, a much loved first team player for South Saxons Hockey Club, tragically lost her life in a car accident on the A21 in October 2023. In her memory, the club has established an annual award 'The Sophie Ford Trophy for Young Player of the Year', with criteria aligned to the attributes that Sophie brought to the club:

- enthusiasm for the sport
- team player
- skill
- determination
- club loyalty

As a further memorial, club members recently collaborated with Sophie's former university student friends at Writtle University College



Sophie Ford (right) with Saxons team-mate Layla Whiteman, April 2023

(near Chelmsford), where she was studying veterinary physiotherapy, to run 5km as part of a Gofundme fundraiser on behalf of her favourite charity, The Barby Keel Animal Sanctuary. Saxons players wearing a rainbow of colours - home, away, tour shirts or goalkeeping kit - undertook a route through the town centre to Old Town, along the sea front to Warrior Square and back up Church Road to Horntye. A social tea and bake sale was held afterwards in the Horntye Bar. It was aimed to raise £2,000, but a total of £3,852 has been collected.

TENNIS

Amherst Ladies Rule

There's both strong local rivalry and shared camaraderie in relations between the tennis players of Amherst, whose club courts sit squarely in Hastings, and those of The Green, a mile or so west in St Leonards.

On the men's side, The Green's doubles teams are currently a little stronger, at least when club coaches Joe Adams and Ross Cudmore (who were both until recently also coaching at Amherst) are enrolled to play. In the Sussex TDS Ultra Winter Doubles league, their first team is poised to be promoted from Division 3 to Division 2. Their second team has been playing alongside the Amherst first team in Division 5 East and beat them 3-1 in a head-to-head contest in December, albeit with Adams as one of their four players.

The respective ladies teams have both been playing in Division 3 and crossed swords last Sunday on the artificial clay courts of Amherst. These had absorbed a high level of

rainfall over previous days, but conditions on a damp and breezy morning were relatively benign.

While Amherst's top pairing of Anita Pearce and Jada Ani swept past The Greens' second-stringers Sheila King and Heather Willcox to win 6-1, 6-0, the outcome on the court alongside couldn't have been closer. Nikki Crowhurst and Pearl Hare won the first set 6-4 over The Green's perennial competition pair, Beaula Page and Amanda Ruck, then succumbed 1-6 in the second. In the third set tie-break, Crowhurst and Hare just squeezed home 10-8.

In the reverse doubles matches, Crowhurst and Hare didn't allow King and Willcox a single game, winning 6-0, 6-0; Pearce and Ani were also too strong for Page and Ruck, winning 6-2, 6-2.

The 4-0 overall win for Amherst puts them at the top of the Division 3 standings with just one match to play - next Sunday (3 March) away at Horsham, who are third. Horsham and second-place Angmering have an extra fixture, but it pits one against the other, so a 3-1 or 4-0 win for the Hastings team next week could see them secure promotion back to Division 2, just a year after relegation and despite not having won any of their first three matches this winter.

By contrast The Green look destined for relegation, though their last match, scheduled for 23 March, will



Amherst captain Nikki Crowhurst

be against fellow-strugglers Weald.

Also last Sunday, the Amherst mixed doubles team cemented their place at the top of the Wealden League with two wins and two walk-overs in a 4-0 home win. The only team to rival them for the year's championship is...The Green, who have a match in hand and an outside chance of overhauling them. Local rivalry remains.



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