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Hastings

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DISSENT, DISORDER, DIVISION

Uproar As Mayor Terminates Council Meeting

PAUL McLAUGHLIN
AND HUGH SULLIVAN

The last full meeting of Hastings Borough Council before May's local elections was suspended and then abandoned last Wednesday (20 March) amid chaotic scenes in the council chamber. The Mayor, Cllr Margi O'Callaghan, sitting as chair, suspended proceedings within a

minute of their start as a member of the public, Gabriel Carlyle, flanked by a number of campaign supporters, got to his feet and called on the Council to discuss a motion in support of a ceasefire in Gaza.

When the Mayor told him this subject was not on the agenda and would not be discussed, he continued to talk over her, while three fellow campaigners stood up raising placards bearing the slogan "Don't Stand By". The Mayor made it clear

that she was unmoved and she, together with a number of Labour and Conservative councillors, filed out of the chamber.

The Mayor has said that the members of public involved were then asked to leave, though they deny that any such request was made. On the other hand, some Hastings Independents councillors encouraged the campaigners to stay, as there was on the agenda of the meeting a motion to amend the council con-

stitution, tabled by one of their number, Cllr Ali Roark, that might have allowed a debate on Gaza to take place in due course (see *Motion for Gaza ceasefire* on page 3).

At this point the police were called, and eventually arrived some 20 minutes later, though the purpose of their intervention has not been explained.

The Mayor consulted in the meantime with the Council's Chief Executive Jane Hartnell and Chief

Legal Officer Mary Kilner, and at around 6.40pm announced that the meeting was abandoned.

Because of the 'purdah' rules governing conduct of local government in the run-up to local elections, no further meeting of the council will take place until late May or even June.

The Mayor has defended her decision to suspend the meeting on the basis that whilst she "welcomed and actively encour-

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YOUR DESIGN, OUR COVER
Bev Elliott @punkqueenofsoho
Let's see your seagull on our cover!
Details from design@yourhip.co.uk

EDITOR'S NOTE

The review of Hastings Contemporary's new spring show (p12) has an interesting suggestion related to the world today: a link between Ethiopian art and evidence of its being the birthplace of all humans. Such a reminder of our common ancestry is clearly relevant today. Our lead story suggests that much of our political class sees equality as something to talk about rather than engage in. The complexities around this issue are explored in relation to the General Dynamics protest (p7).

In Clean Water Watch (p5), we discuss how those with corporate power trump the ordinary consumer. *Hastings is No Place for Hate* (p6) tackles the divisions based on sexual orientation.

And what of the underlying causes? The Education section (p8) expresses a broad agreement among head teachers that "calm and respectful classrooms" are a prerequisite for learning in schools. Compare that with the aggressive and divisive way that social media encourages us to behave.

Thank goodness for festivals like A Town Explores A Book (Listings p8) and Refugee Week (p6) which attempt to bring all parts of the town together.

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News



Cllrs Fernando and Azad at Reform party launch

Election Preparations Gather Pace

Of the eight Hastings Independents councillors on the borough council who defected en masse from the Labour party last December, six were elected in 2022 and are thus not up for re-election until 2026. Another, Cllr Ali Roark, has stated that she does not intend to stand again. Thus only Cllr Maya Evans, ward councillor for Hollington and former depu-

ty leader of the council, will be putting herself on the ballot in May. However, the Independents have announced that they will be fielding candidates in eight other wards as well – six currently held by Conservatives (Ashdown, Baird, Conquest, Maze Hill, St Helens, West St Leonards and Wishing Tree), two by Labour (Central St Leonards and Wishing Tree).

HASTINGS TIDES						
DATE	HIGHAND LOW TIDES				SUNRISE	SUNSET MOON
FRI 29 MAR	H 0:48am	L 7:57am	H 1:01pm	L 8:04pm	5:39	6:26
SAT 30 MAR	H 1:13am	L 8:23am	H 1:30pm	L 8:31pm	5:37	6:27
Don't forget to set your clocks forward!						
SUN 31 MAR	H 2:44am	L 9:51am	H 3:06pm	L 10:04pm	6:35	
MON 1 APR	H 3:24am	L 10:29am	H 3:55pm	L 10:50pm	6:32	7:31
TUES 2 APR	H 4:24am	L 11:26am	H 5:09pm		6:30	7:32 THIRD
WED 3 APR	L 0:00am	H 6:01am	L 12:49pm	H 6:56p	6:28	7:34
THURS 4 APR	L 1:37am	H 7:52am	L 2:33pm	H 8:32pm	6:26	7:35
FRI 5 APR	L 3:19am	H 9:09am	L 3:55pm	H 9:37pm	6:23	7:37
SAT 6 APR	L 4:28am	H 10:05am	L 4:56pm	H 10:27pm	6:21	7:39
SUN 7 APR	L 5:24am	H 10:52am	L 5:49pm	H 11:13	6:19	7:40
MON 8 APR	L 6:16am	H 11:37am	L 6:37pm	H 11:55pm	6:17	7:42 NEW
TUES 9 APR	L 7:04am	H 12:19pm	L 7:21pm		6:15	7:44
WED 10 APR	H 0:36am	L 7:46am	H 1:01pm	L 8:00pm	6:13	7:45
THURS 11 APR	H 1:18am	L 8:26am	H 1:43pm	L 8:37pm	6:10	7:47

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



Cllr Maya Evans pictured at recent Hastings Independents meeting

Cllr Andy Batsford has admitted that, without any national party organisation to back them, they are heavily reliant upon local volunteers to provide logistical support, including social media messaging, for their relatively unknown candidates. One candidate, however, Peter Bailey in Baird, should be well known to local voters, having headed the opposition to redevelopment of the Pilot Field within the ward.

Labour and Green party canvassers have in the meantime been out in strength in the streets of several wards. Labour brochures appear designed to appeal on a broad front, preparing for a forthcoming national election as well as the local ones: they refer to their constituency candidate Helena Dollimore, championing her role in saving the Ridge Fire Station. Both parties take pains to ascribe pothole responsibility to East Sussex County Council (under a Conservative administration) while claiming that their candidates will make it their priority business to maximise reporting on incidents within their wards.

The Conservatives, who will be defending eight of the 16 ward seats in the borough, seem to have kept a lower profile. But Reform UK has established a new local constituency branch in Hastings & Rye following the selection of Lucian Fernando, who, as ward councillor for Silverhill on Hastings Borough Council, defected from the Conservative party to Reform last year, to contest the parliamentary seat in the next general election.

The launch event in the Laya restaurant in St Leonards last Thursday (22 March) was also attended by Cllr Abul Azad, who represents Bexhill North on the county council and is Reform's candidate in the neighbouring constituency of Bexhill & Battle. Cllr Fernando said his party

was "dedicated to fostering an inclusive and transparent political environment where every voice is heard, and every concern is addressed". He promised to "work tirelessly to enact positive change and to build a brighter future for everyone in Hastings and Rye".

CORRECTION:

In HIP 247 we published an article *Can you hear the election drums Fernando* which stated that in June 2021 Cllr Fernando had been "arrested and charged with being drunk in charge of a car. He was later fined and disqualified from driving for a year." He has told us that he was "detained" and not "arrested", and that he was disqualified for six months, not a year.

OLD ROAR UPDATE

Hastings Borough Council's insurers have agreed to fund the cost of an urgent geotechnical survey of the area of Old Roar Gill which suffered a severe landslip last month. The survey will cover both the land in the Gill owned by the council and the private properties directly impacted, some of which had to be vacated.

Council leader Julia Hilton said: "I know the inactivity on Old Roar Gill has been a real frustration for residents, and I completely understand that. We are still awaiting details of timescales, but we are pushing for the work to be carried out as soon as possible. This is a major step in understanding what caused the landslip and identifying what actions need to be taken in moving forward."

Sea Change Looks to Borough Council to Remedy Azur Disrepair

Sea Change Sussex, the publicly funded regeneration company which has held the head lease of the Azur Marina Pavilion since 2007, has appointed national leisure sector property agents Fleurets alongside local agents Dyer & Hobbis to find a new operator. The Pavilion premises were repossessed from previous underlessees Azur Events Limited at the end of January after long-contested winding-up proceedings in the High Court.

A Sea Change spokesperson said last week that the company will be “inviting proposals to consider rather than setting fixed lease terms at the outset”. They would entertain bids “from all interested parties, including local groups that have used the facility in the past”.

It was known that the outgoing underlessees would be leaving the premises in a state of serious disrepair as well as poor decoration. However, it has emerged that Hastings Borough Council (HBC) not only owns the freehold reversion of the building, but has retained responsibility at all times for what are called in the head lease its “common parts”. These include the plant room from which energy (either from mains electricity or diesel generators) is supplied to the rest of the building.

A Sea Change manager, Chris Broome, has written to local ward councillor Tony Collins informing him that their initial surveys have revealed “significant water ingress” within this area. There is also rot to floors within fire escape routes



for which the council is responsible. Remediation costs “look as though they might be quite significant for HBC”, Mr Broome has written, adding: “This is unlikely to be a quick and easy repair for the council.” The works within the hospitality area “appear somewhat limited by comparison”, as most incoming operators “take units as shells and then fit out to their own specifications”. Sea Change is asking council of-

ficers to address these matters urgently. It has also asked that liabilities to the council such as business rates be suspended in the meantime. Mr Broome told Cllr Collins that “a number of serious enquiries” have been received “from a wide variety of operators from within the leisure sector”, but that Sea Change’s ability to proceed to a re-letting is being held up by the issues with the building as a whole.

New Site For Hospice?

The Trustees of St Michael’s Hospice have announced that they are looking to expand their hospice service, including exploring alternative locations.

Dr Karen Clarke, the chief executive, said that while the existing buildings at Upper Maze Hill are in a beautiful place and “hold a special place in the hearts of many”, the capacity to develop them into a modern facility is limited. “Our vision is for a new hospice that not only meets the practical needs of patients, their families and friends, but also captures the care and compassion that defines St Michael’s Hospice – a place where people can live well with dying, death and loss.”

A budget of “at least £10m” for construction of a new facility is envisaged, with the aim of completing a new building by 2030.



Dog Control Order Designates Summer Exclusion Zones

A year and a half after a public consultation over dog controls in Hastings and 12 months since councillors approved a changed regime, an updated dog control public space protection order (PSPO) has finally been brought into force by Hastings

Borough Council (HBC). It covers beaches, parks and green spaces across the borough.

The following rules apply at all times of the year:

- dogs must be on a lead along the whole promenade;

- no more than six dogs can be taken out by one person at any time;
- all dog fouling across the borough must be picked up and put in a bin.

In summer (starting on Monday 1 April and running until 30 September) there will be two areas of beach from which dogs are excluded altogether –

- from the east of Rock-a-Nore to the east side of Hastings pier;
- from the west end of Bottle Alley to opposite the Royal Victoria Hotel
- In the narrow zone between these two areas, dogs will be permitted on- or off-lead; they will also be allowed west of the Royal Victoria up to the borough boundary. In winter (1 October to 31 March) there will be no beach restrictions.

Regulations also apply to some parks and gardens, generally without differentiation between summer and winter. Dogs are not allowed in any of the water in Alexandra Park or St Leonards Gardens. They are also not allowed in children’s play areas, multi-use games areas, skate parks, tennis courts or bowling greens.

Anyone in breach of the new restrictions can be given an on-the-spot fine of up to £100 or prosecuted in court with a potential fine of up to £1,000.

Glenn Haffenden, HBC’s lead councillor for community safety, said that the restrictions “will help keep residents and visitors safe”. He did not explain, however, how they would be enforced.

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‘A Disgrace’ - Party Politicians Wade In

Views of what happened at the council meeting last Wednesday have divided sharply on party political lines

Labour leader in the council Heather Bishop, who is also Deputy Mayor, has strongly supported the actions of the Mayor, her party colleague. She said that the scenes in the council chamber were a “disgrace” which “undermined democracy” and left those present feeling “unsafe and threatened.” She said “the right of individuals to protest was a vital part of our democracy, but when such protests prevent the ability of democratically elected councillors to meet to discuss and make decisions on important issues that matter to local residents, they move beyond legitimate protest and

into mob rule.”

Labour candidate for the Hastings & Rye constituency at the next general election, Helena Dollimore, was not present at the meeting but tweeted on the social platform X: “On Wednesday night, Hastings Council meeting had to be abandoned after a small number of people sought to undermine our local democracy. We cannot allow that to happen. Democracy is the most fundamental of British values. The right to protest is at the heart of that. But when those protests descend into bullying and intimidation then a line has been crossed.

aged members of the public to come along to meetings and to ask questions, it was not right for them to disturb proceedings and to shout at and over councillors meeting in session”.

The further decision to abandon the meeting was taken, she said, only when it became apparent to her that the “protesters” had failed to leave and, in these circumstances, she was left with no option but to adjourn the proceedings. She recalled that in January, when there had been a similar protest over the council’s refusal to consider twinning Hastings with Al-Mawasi in Gaza, the protesters left the chamber immediately. On this occasion, however, they were encouraged to stay by Independent councillor Andy Batsford, but she was not prepared to continue the sitting “with no order”.

RADIO INTERVIEW

When interviewed the following day on Radio Sussex, the Mayor gave a fuller account. She declared that her role was a “non-political position” (notwithstanding that, in previous ballots since her appointment as Mayor last May, she has on more than one occasion exercised her casting vote – in effect voted twice – to ensure a majority for a Labour motion): her job was to “make sure the meeting runs smoothly in line with the constitution and the law – but not only that, to make sure that councillors feel safe and settled and happy.” She complained that councillors out canvassing for the forth-

coming election have been targeted on the doorstep and shouted at. “It’s maybe the same group”, she told the interviewer Danny Pike. “I don’t want to make that accusation, but they’re people with similar mindsets. I put health and safety first, and the constitution”.

She went on to say that she had spoken to Ms Hartnell to ask if there was “anything urgent on the agenda” and was told “nothing that can’t wait”. Some councillors, she said, “were very stressed and shaken”, and “it had got very late” (though recent full council meetings have often lasted two or three hours).

Katy Colley, chair of the Hastings & District Palestine Solidarity Campaign, who was interviewed on the radio show at the same time, gave a radically different version of the evening’s events. “There was one person speaking politely... and a few people who held up signboards”, she said. “Everybody was happy to start the meeting again, but the legal officer – who’s not an elected representative – advised it didn’t go ahead. I don’t understand why important business of the council was not discussed... Democracy was suspended last night and nobody knows why. Concerned people were there to hear councillors talk about what they really care about, and they didn’t get to hear it.”

Another campaigner, Old Town resident Jane Carey, was in the public gallery.” She says she was not asked to leave at any point. “There was absolutely no intimidation”, she maintains.



Still from video footage inside the council chamber on 20 March

Labour will continue to stand up for those who want their politicians to be able to represent them without fear or intimidation.”

By contrast, Becca Horn, prospective parliamentary candidate for the Green Party, was present in the council chambers throughout, and said that the decision to adjourn the meeting altogether was “ridiculous” and “unnecessary”. The majority of the councillors wanted to continue, she said, adding that the Mayor didn’t give a reason at the time for refusing to restart it.

The Leader of the Hastings Inde-

pendent Group of councillors, Paul Barnett, said that in his almost 40 years in local government he had “never seen a meeting abandoned like this before. The lifeblood of local democracy is engaging residents who we are there to represent. When I became council leader, I introduced open public questions at Cabinet meetings and believe that, if the public care enough to attend council meetings, they should be listened to. What happened was unacceptable and Hastings Independents will campaign for changes to ensure that

Hastings Council doesn’t behave like this again.”

His fellow Hastings Independent, Cllr Batsford, agreed, branding the events of the evening as a “disgrace”. He said the motion on Gaza “needed to be heard”, adding that “the rest of the business needed to be heard as well.” He blamed the “Labour Mayor” for adjourning the meeting. He said the “people that came and made their points clearly but succinctly should be commended, and the meeting should have carried on.”

Green party leader of the council, Julia Hilton, who has since her appointment in January sought to adopt a more collaborative approach between the parties spoke more in sorrow than in anger. “I am disappointed”, she said. “The protestors had agreed to leave so as to allow the meeting to continue. An amendment to the constitution would have allowed the motion calling for a ceasefire in Gaza to come to a later meeting... The Mayor removed any possibility of that happening.

“There were a number of important items on the agenda for tonight, including debating a motion to support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill and a change to our constitution to embed opposition chairs and vice chairs in our scrutiny committee. These will now have to wait until the next full council in June.”

Motion for Gaza Ceasefire



Mayor Margi O'Callaghan

Under the existing constitution of Hastings Borough Council (HBC), motions brought for debate “must be about matters for which the Council has statutory powers, duties or functions, or address the built or natural environment of the Borough of Hastings, or address a matter of local, regional or national policy that affects the lives of people in the Borough of Hastings.”

HBC’s Monitoring Officer (currently the Chief Legal Officer Mary Kilner) has the power, in consultation with the Mayor, to rule on whether a motion comes within this remit.

A coalition of councillors from the Green Party and Hastings Independents tabled a motion to the full council meeting at least eight days before the full council meeting on 20 March, calling on HBC to call “for

an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza” in accordance with procedural protocol. They attempted to bring it within the purview of the constitution by referring to recent threats issued to the mosque in Hastings and other indications of high racial/social tensions in the town provoked by the Israeli/Palestine conflict.

However, like two previous attempts by the Greens to table a Gaza ceasefire motion, it was blocked by the Monitoring Officer.

A further motion was then tabled by Hastings Independent councillor Ali Roark proposing – as part of a more general overhaul of the constitution – to widen the remit of motions that councillors may choose to debate. Even if that constitutional amendment had been put up for discussion and accepted, it could not have been implemented so as to retrospectively allow the Gaza motion itself to be debated at the meeting. However, it would presumably have provided a context in which concerns over what is happening in Gaza could be aired for local consumption.

The opportunity for debate was scotched by the abandonment of the meeting.

DEMO CHARGES

Three protestors associated with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) were arrested and charged with aggravated trespass during a demonstration at General Dynamics arms factory on Sidney Little Road on 29 February. Their cases will come before Hastings Magistrates Court at 10am next Wednesday (April 3).

Katy Colley, chair of the Hastings & District PSC, says that each accused will be pleading not guilty, and that campaigners “will be there to show our solidarity and support”.

Colley adds that the PSC demonstration in February was peaceful and “attended by dozens of locals outraged at General Dynamics’ ongoing supply of arms to Israel, which is on trial at the International Court of Justice for genocide in Gaza. It was one of many peaceful protests held by the PSC and community partners outside the American-owned arms factory, drawing attention to General Dynamics’ part in this genocide.

“The company makes all the MK80 bombs being dropped on Gaza, and the Hastings sites make tactical communication systems for ground vehicles as well as avionic systems for the fighter jets dropping the bombs”, she says. “The Hastings three are not the guilty ones - General Dynamics is guilty!”



Water Bill Boycott: Town Hall Event

There is something about the impunity with which England’s water companies are allowed to dump sewage into our rivers and seas: it seems emblematic of the corruption and gross inequality that pervade all corners of our crumbling public realm. The town hall meeting clearly laid out how this is allowed to happen. It was explained that although the companies are monopolies and we have no choice as to who provides our water, they are protected legally and financially. Meanwhile, consumers and the environment have no protection at all.

The meeting was attended by people who refuse to pay for phantom wastewater services or are considering refusal. Also attending were those who have attempted to seek redress in the courts – or are in the process of doing so – and those whose lives have been made a misery by trying to get a byzantine and dysfunctional Southern Water to deal with the sewage that rises in

their home every time Hastings floods. All were united by a sense of frustration and outrage.

A stunning 70% of England’s water companies are owned by foreign investors, including investment firms, banks, hedge funds, foreign governments, and businesses based in tax havens. Since privatisation in 1989, these owners have extracted money from the water companies for their shareholders while loading them with debt. Southern Water owes £5.7 billion; if you are a Southern Water customer, 27% of your bill goes on servicing that debt.

So how are the water companies able to borrow so much money? At the meeting on 15 March, Julie Bygraves laid out how the price we pay for water is determined by a regulator. Amongst other things, the regulated asset base not only guarantees profits for water companies, but also allows them to charge borrowing costs to their customers. In addition, as collateral for borrowing, the com-



panies would seem to suggest this. However, there is another, even more pernicious, reason. In a letter to OFWAT last month, the Chair of the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs Committee wrote that it was “concerned” that enforcing regulations and issuing fines against “consistently failing entities” would risk causing their financial collapse, so OFWAT should therefore not use “the full extent of its powers.” In other words, indebted water companies should be allowed to break the law to stave off their probably inevitable collapse.

There is, however, one area where the consumer does have some leverage: Southern Water has 2.6 million customers. Many of them are paying by direct debit, which allows the water company to keep those accounts in surplus, often to the tune of hundreds of pounds. This creates a huge pool of ‘borrowed’ money to help keep them afloat, on which, of course, they are paying no interest. So, if Southern Water’s banditry is making you furious, cancel that direct debit now.

For more information go to sussexbylines.co.uk and search Money down the drain and Water nationalisation is the best option.

panies use their physical assets, which we paid for before they received them debt-free at privatisation – and continue to pay for. Both of these mechanisms incentivise the borrowing of increasing sums of money, the charges for which are loaded onto customers’ bills.

In 1991, two years after the privatisation of water companies, the Water Industries Act overrode common law in a clause that protects water companies from individual legal challenges. There are now only

two bodies, OFWAT and the Environment Agency (EA) that can prosecute water companies for not carrying out their legal duties. This includes the safe and legal disposal of wastewater: i.e. not dumping it into rivers and seas.

As pointed out in the meeting, these bodies have the powers to regulate and enforce the water companies; they just don’t do it. So, is this a case of ‘failure by design’? The revolving doors between the water companies and the regulating bod-

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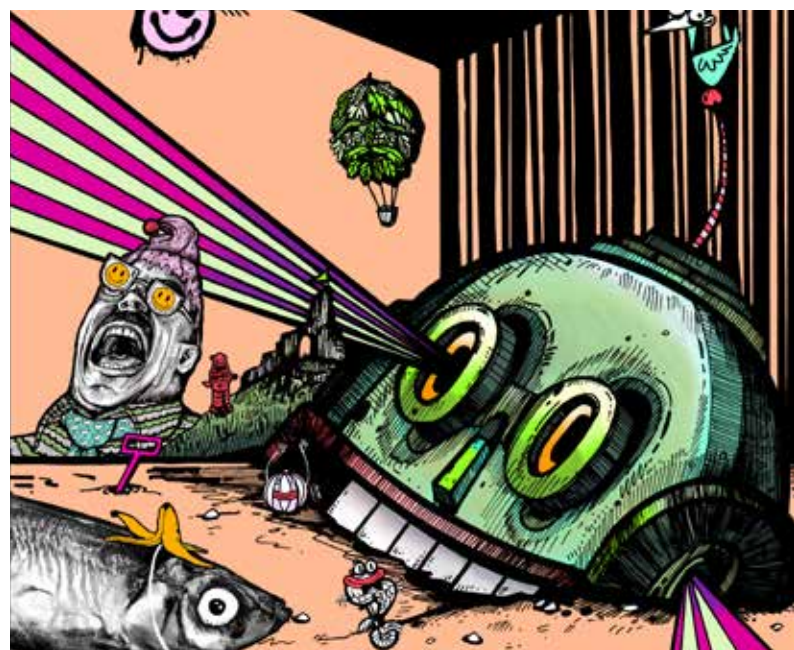
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HIS PLACE



June Comedy Bonanza

JAKE ALEXANDER, one of the directors of Hastings Comedy Festival, previews what's in store this June

This June, be prepared for a week of laughter as the annual Hastings Comedy Festival returns from 10-16 June. Currently in its ninth year, the comedy festival has a packed printed programme, which is now available across participating venues and various spots across Hastings and St Leonards.

The team feel there is a comedy show for everyone: tour shows, fringe previews and exclusive work in progress, along with comedy for kids at The Observer Building (Saturday 15 June). And don't miss Hastings Comedy Festival's prestigious newcomer competition, The Norman Award, returning to The Crypt with last year's winner, Dan Harding, performing his new full show.

There are over 80 standup comedy acts to choose from, including previous British Comedian of the Year winner Jeff Innocent performing his tour show, *Smart Casual*, at East Hastings Angling Club (15 June). Mark Thomas returns to Hastings with an exclusive preview of his new show, and 2023 Funny Woman winner Kate Cheka will be performing on 14 June. Joe Kent-Walters, BBC New Comedian of the Year and Best Show 2024 winner at Leicester Comedy Festival, will be appearing in character as Frankie Monroe at Electric Palace.

Newcomers Lucy Porter, Kyrah Gray, Katie Green, and Jordan Brookes will be performing in Hastings for the first time, as well as Red

Richardson. Many of the festival favourites will be returning to town, such as Improv group The RH Experience, Josh Baulf, Elliot Steel, Olga Koch, Tony Law and Russell Hicks, to name just a few. There will also be a variety of very funny local comedians including Sam Willett, Nick Elleray and Taz Long.

Some of the participating venues this year include The Albion, Jenny Lind, Ye Olde Pump House, The Piper, Heist Market, Oscars, Cumbia Kitchen, Sugarpie Honeybuns, The Good Place, Brewing Brothers Courtyard and The Printworks.

With so much comedy and creative performance to choose from, start planning your festival and come and show support for live comedy and a local independent festival which has made its mark nationwide and beyond.

Hastings Comedy Festival 2024 is sponsored by Lightning Fibre, with support from Love Hastings.



Full listings and tickets links can be found at hastingscomedyfestival.com. You can follow Hastings Comedy Festival on Instagram, Facebook, X and YouTube.

If you are interested in volunteering to be part of the Comedy Festival team, contact directors Chris and Jake at hastingscomedy-festival@yahoo.com.



PAUL McLAUGHLIN

Hastings is No Place for Hate

PAUL McLAUGHLIN

Hastings Town Hall Community Hub hosted a free event earlier this month (9 March) to help raise awareness of efforts to tackle hate crime within the town. *Hastings is No Place for Hate* was organised by the LGBT+ Community and Service Support in conjunction with Hastings Heart and Sussex Police to promote local services that are available to help and support local organisations in dealing with the consequences of hate crime.

Chloe Cameron, a local Neighbourhood Policing PCSO, says: "Hate crime comes in many different

forms and strikes at the heart of communities. With the help of the public, we can tackle those responsible for hate crime and keep our communities safe."

Sally-Ann Hart, the local Conservative MP for Hastings and Rye, and Helena Dollimore, Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate, were enthusiastic supporters of the event. They were joined by Mayor Margi O'Callaghan, who said the Council and the people of Hastings were "ready to help anyone who has been affected by someone else's prejudice, ignorance, or violence". She urged people to learn how to spot a hate crime, report it, or get help, support and advice.

James Thomas, a local Police

Community Support volunteer, says he was "extremely pleased that Sussex Police and the service and community support organisations had come together to showcase the support and safe spaces available in Hastings for the growing LGBT+ community."

He says he had experienced homophobic abuse in the town three years ago and was determined to help LGBT+ people share their experiences and to give them a voice and the confidence to report hate crime and to understand the support available. "I am proud to be part of the team that has bought this event to life."

Hastings is No Place for Hate followed a similarly successful event held at the De la Warr Pavilion in Bexhill last October, and Kim Batty, the co-founder of Hastings Heart, said she was "really excited" to host this event in the Community Info Hub, adding that "Hastings is for everyone and there is no place in our town for hate crime."

Those involved in Saturday's event included: the Hastings and Rother Rainbow Alliance, Transpride Hastings, Hastings Voluntary Action, LGBT+ Switchboard, Eggtooth, Allsorts, Mindout, Victim Support, Hastings Rother Rainbow Alliance, Hastings Trans Pride, Hastings Pride, Hastings Therapy Centre, St Michael's Hospice Queer Bereavement, Warming up the Homeless, Hastings Book Festival, Hastings Book Shop, Hastings Voluntary Action and i-Rock.

To report a hate crime, contact Sussex Police on 101 or 999.

Refugee Week 2024

The Refugee Buddy project announces that it has been awarded a Small Project Grant from Arts Council England to support Refugee Week 2024 and what this means.

This year Refugee Week will take place from 17-23 June, when hundreds of large and small national and international events will be held, initiated by Counterpoints Arts. The theme is *Our Home*: from the places we gather to share meals to our collective home, Earth. We are looking forward to working with local artists and partners to celebrate our home here in Hastings and St Leonards, making it a welcoming, safe and sustainable place for all.

With this funding we will produce an inclusive public arts programme and build on the creative relationships we have developed across our community over the



COURTESY OF HASTINGS REFUGEE BUDDY PROJECT

past few years, ensuring Refugee Week becomes an anticipated annual celebration, promoting a culture of welcome.

Thanks to this funding, our programme of activities will involve commissioning new artists and working collaboratively with new partners in Bexhill and Rye. And we will continue to build on our valued partnerships, holding events at the De La Warr Pavilion and the Hastings Museum and Art Gallery.

There are opportunities for artists, local businesses and individuals and community groups to get involved, and we will be releasing more information over the coming

weeks, so please keep an eye on our website and social media. You can also contact the project manager, Rebecca Sinker, directly to register your interest: Rebecca@therefugeebuddyproject.org.

"We are really excited that we can continue the great success of the 2023 Refugee Week of compassion, kindness and creativity which brought together people from across the community in a warm celebration. Refugee Week 2024 will be a chance to showcase the best of our home, so get involved and help us create a community welcome." – Ros-sana Leal, founder and CEO, The Refugee Buddy Project.

Playing, Promoting and Producing

FIONA MCGARRY talks to Holly Harman about her life in music and her latest venture as a music promoter

Holly Harman seems an ideal fit for the Hastings and St Leonards cultural scene – or maybe Hastings and St Leonards is the ideal place for her. ‘Many strings to her bow’ aptly describes Holly – especially as she’s a violinist.

Holly’s musical journey took her to The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, specialising in Baroque

and Historical Performance; since then, she has toured and recorded with some of Europe’s premier orchestras. She also formed her own band, The Twisted Twenty, a band that ‘twisted’ 18th century British folk music for a modern-day audience while still playing on original Baroque instruments. In 2018, she set up her Penny Fiddle Records



HOLLY HARMAN

label to promote her band and release its debut album.

Holly moved here four years ago, and “one thing led to another,” until this February when she launched Sounds St Leonards, which is, as Holly puts it, “a yearly concert series bringing world-renowned performers to East Sussex”.

The ‘one thing leading to another’ happened after other musicians

joined her record label, and she started promoting their concerts, including a sold-out gig by Tamsin Elliott and Tarek Elazhary in 2023.

These were so well received that she was keen to expand: “I’m interested in diverse programming. I felt there was a bit of a gap in the market in terms of folk and global roots music, so this year, I decided to put on a concert series.”

This year’s series is six concerts hosted by The Crown House and St John’s Church in Pevensey Road, deliberately programmed in weeks when there aren’t any other major gigs or festivals. The artists include Nina Harries, Suntou Susso, Tarren, Siger and Ruby Colley.

Although appearing to follow a trail of opportunities, Holly has a clear vision of how she selects performers: “It was important to me to make sure that it was really diverse, including global majority, female and non-binary artists.” She also wanted to include artists who play different types of stringed instruments and experiment with blending genres. “I think audiences should be challenged, and Hastings and St Leonards is a perfect place for that.”

Holly has also received an Arts Council grant to train as a record producer. Clarifying how this happened “by chance” she explains: “A friend of mine phoned in need of a producer who could give him more direction – I happened to have a week off ... Having been in recording sessions before, I kind of knew what to do.”

Finding she really loved the experience, she was keen to take things further. Turning an idea into action, a bid writer she met encouraged her to apply for an arts council grant to learn the dark arts of production, saying: “You could really develop this as a personal project.”

Holly understands she still has a lot to learn. “Lots of technical knowledge is missing and I might have to go back to college. The role I see myself doing is helping artists to do the best they can in a stressful situation. A go-between role. Some producers are really nurturing and that’s what you want.”

More information about the concert series is available at: sounds-stleonards.co.uk where there are also ticket links available.

More Than a Local Protest

ROD WEBB reflects on joining the protest outside the Hastings site of General Dynamics, a company involved in supplying weapons to Israel used in the slaughter of Palestinian civilians

My understanding of the Israel/Palestine issue has been influenced by many factors in my life. I grew up in a fundamentalist Christian sect which saw the creation of an Israeli state as fulfilment of biblical prophecy. I subsequently spent many years working in the Middle East, beginning in 1979 with a year teaching in Algeria. The latter led to marriage with an Algerian (who sadly died in 1999), the mother of my two children.

So, I feel I have a broad understanding of the issues relating to Israel and Palestine, and while fully supporting Palestinian rights, I appreciate that the environment within which people grow up plays a fundamental part in our world view. Couple this with well-established flaws in human psychology and it soon becomes clear why this latest chapter in the Israel/Palestine dispute is such a contentious issue.

I was faced with my own psychological dilemma when it emerged

that General Dynamics has a site in Hastings; this is a company directly implicated in the supply of weapons to Israel – their weapons being used to indiscriminately kill Palestinian civilians. I remember feeling a strange sense of unease, exacerbated by the call to protest outside the gates of this local employer. Although I believed that supplying such weapons made the company complicit in murder, even possibly liable for acts of genocide, there appeared to be an unresolved internal conflict keeping me from joining the protest.

And rather than sitting down and discussing this with others, I buried my doubts amongst the usual day-to-day preoccupations with other things: my only excuse being that during this time I also had an accident.

It was only when I was beginning to recover that I realised I had to take part in these regular Wednesday protests. And having done so, I



KATY WEINZ

was finally able to think more clearly about the implications of my hesitation. It made me realise how most, if not all, of us can be swayed by conflicting beliefs. In my case, there was a conflict between doing what I could in a small way to fight this massive injustice and a sense of ‘not wanting to upset the status quo’. Perhaps I was concerned about highlighting how ordinary, hard-working people – people I could so easily meet in shops and cafes around town – were complicit in something so awful. Or maybe it was facing how easy it was to be complicit, reconciling the everyday with the unthinkable.

It was a cold morning when I stood outside General Dynamics with all the other protesters, many

of whom had been there from the start, three of whom have faced arrest. The conviction, the humanity and the shared sense of community was a great way to resolve uncertainty.

But my own hesitation, which I can in no way defend, pales in comparison with that of someone faced with losing their livelihood in standing up for a cause, and it is notable how so many high-profile people won’t raise their voices. My own experience made me realise how frail so many of us are, subject as we are to psychological complexity that we don’t fully understand.

It has reinforced my belief that we should be slow to condemn others: by all means condemn their actions, but always try to retain

some compassion for human frailty. Just looking around today, we can see how easily people can deceive themselves into doing nothing in the face of grave injustice.

By chance this morning, I listened to Ilan Pape, the great Jewish Israeli scholar and tireless campaigner for Palestinian rights, talking about how the Israeli education system has indoctrinated a whole new generation of Israelis and how, even in a changed environment, it could take several years to change their stance. The wonderful thing was that he remains hopeful for a just outcome.

For more information on the protest go to hastingspalestine-campaign.org.



Driving Positive Change

In a recent issue HIP considered the arguments over academies vs local authority maintained schools. Here CALLUM THOMSON interviews Liam Collins, former headteacher of Ark Alexandra Academy.

I decided to contact Liam Collins shortly after I left Ark Alexandra Academy. He was my headteacher for the first two years I worked there. He was gentle and approachable, with a relaxed smile, and would make an effort to put junior teachers, like myself, at ease with a joke or a saying applicable to the experience we had just endured. I engaged with him most during inset days, where, speaking to the whole staff, he would encourage us to stick with the strategy, or notify us of changes, and the reasons for them. His talks always contained an inspirational saying, like ‘work hard and be nice to people’, or ‘excellence is not an act, but a habit’. When he announced he would be leaving, staff were surprised, but there was also an acceptance that the school was underperforming. Having steadily improved over the 2021-22 academic year, narrowly missing

out on a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating, the following year there was a sense the school had slid backwards.

Collins is an experienced school leader, and has held various senior positions in both local authority (LA) maintained schools and academies. He has been a vice principal at a school in Bexley in Greater London, a deputy head at Roding Valley High School in Essex, and a head at two schools in East Sussex; Uplands Community College and Ark Alexandra Academy. In 2023, he left Ark Alexandra Academy to work in a role offering guidance to senior leadership teams across a number of schools within the Beckmead Trust, who serve students exclusively with special educational needs.

His experience makes him well-placed to weigh in on the debate around who should run our schools, academies or LAs. The debate is between, on the one hand, a belief in

large-scale market processes to drive improvement, and on the other, council-run schools that protect local interests and are more accountable to the community they serve.

However, Liam Collins believes that, for a leader trying to improve a school, this debate is peripheral. Speaking to me on the phone as he drove home from work, he was adamant: “The first thing to say is the structure of the school makes no difference. Ultimately it is the people. It doesn’t matter if you work for an LA school or an academy trust. Everything comes down to the autonomy you are given, and the way the trust or the local authority operates”.

Though I had set out to discuss the differences, positive and negative, between academies and LA schools, Collins emphasised that it is the values, practices and professionalism of the people in charge that are important, and these can differ greatly between individual LA maintained schools, as well as academies. So we set aside this question and spoke instead about leadership styles, and his particular approach to driving positive change.

FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

Interestingly, when talking about his identity as a leader, Collins did not stress the type of school he wants to produce: art-focussed or science-focussed; academic or vocational; learning through action or by listening to the teacher in silence. He was more interested in talking about how schools drive change; the means, not the ends; the how, not the what. The reason the

how is of more interest to Collins than the what, is because there seems to be consensus between heads around the type of school they wish to produce. The important question then becomes, how should they go about getting schools there?

So, what is the agreed ‘gold standard’? Broadly, heads believe that institutions need a ‘culture’; the customs and norms which make behaviour in a school consistent and predictable. This focus is encouraged by the government’s lead Behaviour Advisor, Tom Bennett, who urges schools to think of their culture as ‘how we do things around here’. Though the specifics may differ, what is understood as ‘positive culture’ is similar everywhere. Leaders want calm, respectful classrooms, where students try, and recognise the teacher’s authority. “Once you’ve got the culture in the place you want it to be”, Collins says, “then you can start to drive through improvements”.

Heads are also united in their pursuit of good exam results. When I asked whether education has become too results-driven, Collins replied, “I don’t disagree with people who talk about holistic education. However, it is no good to anybody if we’ve managed to shape a student into a reasonable human being, but they haven’t got the opportunity at the next step because we haven’t worked hard enough with them to get good results. Results are their passport to further opportunity”. It is the ‘how’ of getting schools to a point where there is a positive school culture, and the results are good, where he differentiates himself. “The thing that we all know,” he says, “is that there are

1,000 different ways to achieve the same goal”.

RAPID AND INCLUSIVE CHANGE

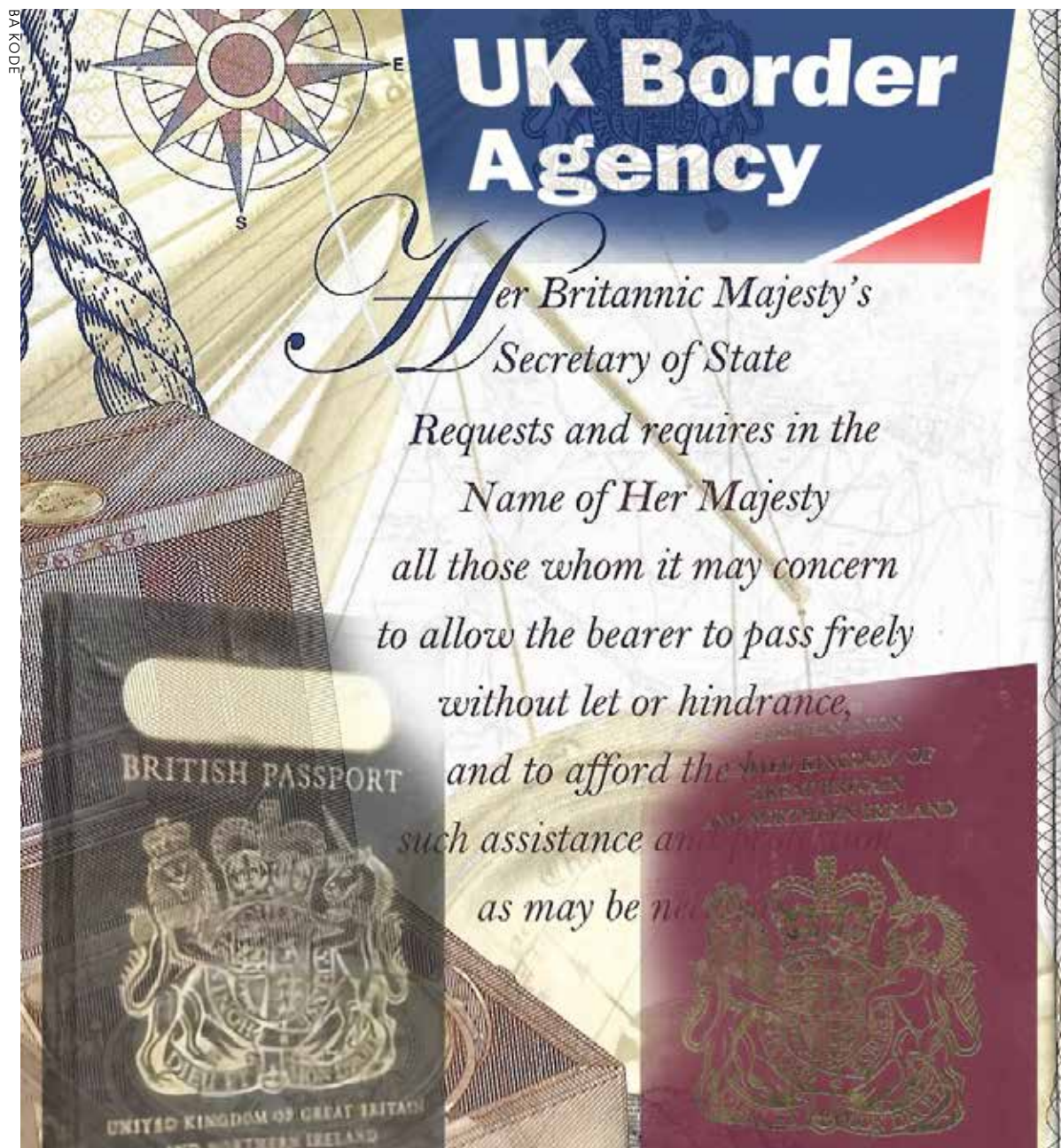
A key marker of difference between school leaders is how they respond to the expectation of schools to improve rapidly. There is pressure to achieve good results and avoid a less-than-good Ofsted rating. “It is a P45 moment if your results are not where they should be,” Collins says. While caring about the destination of a school with a positive culture and good outcomes, he also cares about the integrity of the process. “Being able to connect with people is a really important part of a role. Have I got the staff on board? Have I got the students on board? And once you find that tipping point then generally the parents are on board”.

Collins was most motivated by working with the ‘characters’; those students, and their parents, who initially struggle to adhere to the demands of the culture. “What’s the saying? You’re judged by how you work with the most vulnerable people, and that was always my moral purpose, so to speak”. This approach comes with challenges. Valuing the participation of each individual means bespoke treatment of each individual’s needs. “I was always interested in the nuance, and the grey”, he says, “but of course that does make you an inconsistent decision-maker”. An alternative, as he characterises it, is a ‘my way or the highway’ approach, where leaders want all students to walk from A to B, and anyone who falls outside of that is rejected. Contrary to his intuition though, this approach can produce the rapid, transformational change headteachers are increasingly expected to deliver. “Some of these leaders have turned round schools in areas of high deprivation,” he says.

CHANGE TAKES TIME

Ultimately, Collins is proud of the breakthroughs with students and parents who may otherwise be left behind. He remembers how one of his most vocal critics, a student’s grandmother, became an outspoken supporter after he visited her at home to explain his vision. “Go talk to Mr Collins” she’d say to online critics, “he’ll sort it out”.

It raises the question of whether we should expect, or want, rapid change. Education places unique pressures on headteachers. Its ‘marketisation’ during the late 80s means education is results-driven and competitive, yet also a public service. Headteachers are expected to deliver results expressed in data or lose pupils and funding to competing schools. Yet they are also expected to serve the complex patchwork of individuals in their communities. Difficult though this may be, Collins believes leaders should strive for both. On how long it takes to get there, he says, “I strongly believe that you need to be prepared for things to take time”.



Class and Mobility

ROBIN HOLTOM

The Independent Inspector of Borders and Immigration, David Neal, recently revealed that 10 private planes a day arrive in London without proper passport checks. He was sacked the next day.

This reminded me of a visit I made with students from Hastings College to New York in 2002. One of the students was prevented from flying with us because the first name on her ticket was different from the name on her passport. I asked the Virgin Airways staff member if there was any way round it – although it was understandable that the Twin Towers attack had recently increased security concerns. Surprisingly, I was told that if the student could buy a first class ticket, they would let her through passport control. This was far too expensive – about four times the cost – but it made us all aware that there were rules about mobility for

rich people which are different to the rules for the rest of us.

Up until the First World War, it was possible to travel throughout most of Europe without a passport. One reason for this was that the railways had made travel so easy for so many people that it was simply too complicated to impose passport controls on every journey. Evidently, in the minds of governments at that time, the benefits of freedom of movement outweighed security concerns; but the War stopped free movement and passports were required thereafter.

During the Second World War, it became a patriotic duty in Britain to give lifts to hitchhikers since many servicemen would hitch lifts while travelling to or from their barracks. A remnant of this willingness to give lifts continued well into the 1960s. A backpacker disembarking from the ferry in Calais would be faced with the prospect of a long queue of perhaps 50 hitchhikers lining up along the main road to Paris. Nonetheless, it would

only take about an hour before getting a lift.

Now the queues in Calais are very different and coming in the other direction. And no one gives lifts unless they are part of a criminal gang or prepared to risk a jail sentence. At the same time as mobility is easy for many of us, it is extremely difficult for others. Among those moving from countries laid waste by war or suffering from famine resulting from climate change, 8,500 migrants died last year attempting to be more mobile.

Mobility has become the new marker of class difference. Whereas class differences used to be defined by inheritance, wealth and education, now the differences are defined by mobility. Our Prime Minister travels by private plane rather than train. Expensive cars and foreign holidays denote middle class mobility, while the rest have to depend upon buses and trains. Of course the super rich, the 'new aristocracy', travel by rocket to circumnavigate the world and even consider colonising Mars. From their new vehicles they will be able to look down on the rest of us from an even greater height

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

✉ Letter

WAITING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Dear HIP

On a recent evening my wife had a fall and I drove her to A&E at the Conquest Hospital. The time taken for triage, consultation, a CT scan and, finally, admission to the surgical assessment ward was 12 hours. My wife is nearly 80 years of age, has Parkinson's disease and is frail. The experience of waiting for that long in an uncomfortable, noisy, very bright, crowded, hot and not very clean room was, in itself, a hazard to health.

That said, all the staff we met – triage, doctor, radiographer, nurses – were efficient, courteous, kindly and very hard working. I saw no evidence of wastage or time-wasting.

The wait gave me the opportunity to talk to a number of other outpatients. I would guess that only a third required emergency treatment. Time and again I heard the same story: they had tried to arrange an appointment with their GP, none was available, they were referred to the 111 NHS helpline and, in turn, advised to attend A&E.

I have travelled a good deal in Europe, have friends who live there, and my experience is that healthcare in neighbouring countries is far better. I now spend time in retirement volunteering locally. This role gives me the chance to meet many international visitors, but I am often embarrassed by their own bewildered observations of our deteriorating local environment: an outdated infrastructure; poor quality yet expensive public transport, especially train; traffic-crowded and poorly surfaced roads, and a near total absence of cycle lanes – unlike Holland, and Germany. They are also aware of the visible local poverty with boarded-up shops and rough sleeping.

I blame our Government for robbing essential services – health, education, transport – of the support, encouragement and systemic structure they need to be vital and productive. On the other hand, those who give so little to public service seem over-rewarded, 'honoured', and free from responsible accountability.

Now, almost 80, having worked

hard all my life and with some knowledge of public services, I have never seen things as bad as they are. How can our government have allowed this appalling situation to develop?

I have written more in sorrow than anger, to my local MP Huw Merriman. He has not earned and will not receive my vote; but then I have little faith in the official opposition. I should like a reply to my letter but anticipate it will merely parade the familiarly fatuous spending figures and a declared commitment to the health service, which, after my wife's very difficult experience and that of others I talk to, can only sound hollow.

Name and address supplied.

✉ Letter

EMBARRASSING COUNCIL

Dear HIP,

What a great, but at the same time shocking, article you published by Elspeth Tiddlypush (*The Chamber of Horrors* in HIP 246).

Hastings and St Leonards has a great and proud history and, even now, some of that history is reflected in our beautiful town. The fact that our Council chooses to meet in one of the worst buildings in the town, ridiculously called Muriel Matters House, in a room lacking in any charm and clearly not fit for purpose, says it all.

Where is the leadership, where is the flair? It is little wonder much of the money flowing into the town is bypassing the Council and ending up with bodies such as Hastings Commons – an organisation itself facing questions around accountability, it would appear.

I trust our councillors will read and reflect on Elspeth Tiddlypush's piece. Hastings has more than its fair share of issues. Where the Council meets is not high on that list but it is a symptom. One of Elspeth's bleak conclusions is: "If this is our local democracy in action, it is embarrassing." The sad truth is that the decisions emanating out of the Council seem equally embarrassing. The Council needs to step up and embrace its leadership role. It could start by publishing a new Statutory Plan.

Graham Seaton

We would love to hear from you.

✉ letters@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk

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



Cunning Men, Witches & Devils

DAVID EP DENNIS

It's 1593. What is a mother to do when her precious child is sick? There is no NHS, no internet or mobile phones. The vicar's prayers are no use and the town of Rye, where the poor widow Elizabeth (Lizzie) Drynkwater is living, is in serious trouble for hiding its fish catches and not offering them to the monarch for first pick. Powerful men: Rye's MP Robert Bett, the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports Sir William Brooke, 10th Baron Cobham – one

of the Queen's spies – and Sir Francis Knollys, Queen Elizabeth I's courtier, are all hovering over everything that happens in Rye.

Yet there is no doubt that Mrs Drynkwater's child is sick, so off to Hastings she must go, where, it is said, there lives a cunning man called Zacharius. Upon arrival, Lizzie finds out that the cunning man lodges in the High Street with a fellow called Goodman Combes. When Lizzie arrives at Zachary's lodgings, there are two large women blocking the doorway. "I've come from Rye on the back of my good friend's horse," says Lizzie. "My child is sick,

let me in."

Sly and crafty, Zachary listens and smiles. He informs Lizzie that her child has been bewitched by Mother Rogers and tells her that to make her child well again, she must take a knife and plunge it into Mother Rogers' buttocks. And so back she goes to Rye, and sure enough, Mother Rogers and her cat are just by Lizzie's door. Lizzie invites her into the kitchen. However, taking the knife, Lizzie loses the courage

for a frenzied buttock-stabbing, and instead pricks Mother Rogers in the hand. The witch runs out of the kitchen to salve her wound, and suddenly Lizzie's child is well again. It is a miracle, thanks to the Cunning Man of Hastings.

A DISCOVERY OF CUNNING

Across the whole of Britain there were people known as 'cunning folk'. They were not witches in the notorious mediaeval sense, but they did delve into the arcane arts. For example, as late as 1810, in the north of England, there was a cunning man called Wrightson who was the seventh son of a seventh daughter and who could kill a witch's spell using "pin-sticking, bottery-tree magic and heart frizzling."

There were, of course, cunning women too. They could diagnose witchcraft and inform the witchfinders, make people love one another using spells and heal sick animals and humans. Eventually, people and the state woke up to realise this was all fakery and mumbo-jumbo, except for the positive use of psychology – that if you do this all will be well – and of course the use of herbal medicines that really worked. However, in the case of Margaret, Lady Sondes, daughter of Sir Francis Knollys, who became insane, Elizabeth I's astrologer, Dr John Dee, had to be called in to investigate, and thankfully he removed Satan from her: "Dr Dee hath delivered the Lady Sondes of a devil or of some other strange possession."

In Sussex and in Hastings, there were few witch trials compared to the rest of England and indeed Europe. Sussex authorities prosecuted three

men and thirteen women for witchcraft between 1558 and 1736, but only four were hanged. In those days, the pillory was used for all sorts of punishments. An irritating citizen of Rye had his ear nailed to the pillory, while Alice Casselowe who had bewitched a pig and an ox, had died in the pillory.

If you refused to plead guilty or not guilty, you could be pressed to death using huge boulders. This was because under mediaeval common law, a method of torture known as 'Peine forte et dure' (Law French for "forceful and hard punishment") involved placing heavier and heavier stones upon a defendant who refused to plead ("stood mute"), until a plea was entered, or fatal suffocation occurred. The idea was to coerce defendants to submit to the court's jurisdiction. Sometimes defendants charged with capital offences refused to plead to escape forfeiture of property, allowing their heirs to inherit their estate. 'Peine forte et dure' was abolished in Great Britain in 1772.

All sorts of strange practices were undertaken by the vengeful few who really did want to do harm. For example, one so-called witch had kept sides of beef, and as they rotted in the open air of her yard, so too were the people she had cursed expected to rot away. However, the many laws against these cunning and witchlike practices implemented the terrible deaths by burning and hanging of thousands. Two-thousand five hundred 'witches' were executed in Scotland alone. Most victims were old and poor. For those of you who would like to read the original Cunning Man record in East Sussex Archives, here it is:

Deposition of Elizabeth Drynkwater – 18 January 1593

"She sayeth that she supposeinge her childe to be bewytched by reason the same was very weake, she went to Hastinge to one Zacharias, who lodgeth within Goodman Combes, whome she had hard to be a connyng man, to know of him what her child lacked, who told to this examynat that one Mother Rogers had bewytched her child and gave her counsell to fetch blodd of her in takeinge a knyffe and to thrust it in her buttocke, but she tooke another corse for she prycked her in the hande and thereupon presently her child tooke rest and 2 great gerles dyd heare when the said Zachary gave her that counsell."

Apparently, Zachary had all his arcane books taken from him and given to a Hastings vicar for safekeeping.

Further Reading:

The History of Magic – From Alchemy to Witchcraft, from the Ice Age to the Present (Gooden, C. 2021)

Magisteria – The Entangled Histories of Science and Religion (Spencer, N. 2023)

The Arch-Conjuror of England – John Dee (Parry, G. 2013)



The Stables: Saluting the volunteers

STUART BAILLIE'S monthly theatre news

Next up at The Stables is Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*. It was his last play and takes place on a Russian estate at the turn of the 20th century. Serfs have been liberated, revolution knocks at the door. The nonsensical, self-interested lives of the characters, preoccupied by love, money and coffee, seem farcical under the pressure of vast, indifferent social forces. It's a deeply human play evoking an experience of trying to make sense of life. It runs from Friday 12 until Saturday 20 April.

Something that might surprise many people about The Stables is that it is entirely run by volunteers. When you phone the box office, book a ticket, buy a drink at the bar, you'll talk to a volunteer. The sets, lighting and sound are provided by volunteers and the actors, directors and stage managers are volunteers too – it's a proper community theatre.

I've been speaking to Ben Randall, who recently recorded a podcast about the work of something called the programme advisory group (PAG), which operates within the theatre. Ben chairs that committee and describes it as offering support wherever it's needed to make sure any performance has the best chance of being as good as it can be. For Ben, the volunteer model ensures The Stables does not just survive, but also thrives. There's no

huge overhead to meet to pay staff wages, so the theatre can take risks and experiment while also providing the audience with the staples they know and love.

More than that though, in recent years The Stables has been at the forefront of developing new writers, with an annual competition that sees the winner's play being performed on stage. The most recent example of that was *One Night In The Many Deaths of Sonny Liston*. Ben says of it, "...the writing in the Sonny Liston play was just sublime...". And Ben's own play, *Whiskey and Soda*, about an imaginary meeting in 1979 between Margaret Thatcher and John Lennon, which won a couple of years ago, has gone on to be performed in a number of theatres in the United States.

The Stables might appear to be just like any other community theatre, but step through its doors and you can't help but be impressed by the levels of creativity and dedication. If you'd like to volunteer, then come on down and say hello.



If you'd like to hear Stuart Baillie's interview with Ben Randall in full then search 'Stables Theatre Hastings' in

Apple Podcasts or Spotify.
stablestheatre.co.uk



A Night in the Death of a Pugilist

NICK PELLING gets a glimpse of a boxer's tale

Unless you are a boxing aficionado, the name Sonny Liston conjures up only a vague idea of a heavyweight slugger from yesteryear. But the recent play at the Stables Theatre, *One Night in the Many Deaths of Sonny Liston*, manged, rather brilliantly, to bring back to life a man whose tale touched the heights, but was at the same time a tragic struggle against the deadly racism and criminality of urban America in the 1950s and 60s.

The award-winning play, by J B Heaps, adopts an intriguing approach: setting the story on the last night of Liston's life in December 1970. This is a challenging device because we don't really know what happened then, except that Liston was found dead in mysterious circumstances. As the title of the play cleverly implies, there are many conspiracy theories about how he may have met his demise, ranging from heart attack to heroin OD administered by the mob. The play offers a twisted sort of answer.

Pablo McFee delivers a brooding, physical performance of a tormented soul nursing a lifetime of resentments. The plot revolves around a glamorous female visitor – played with much simmering ambiguity by Britney Rae – who unexpectedly knocks on Sonny's door one dark Vegas night. Their sparring dialogue cleverly unfolds much of Lis-

ton's life story, whilst all the time suggesting that neither character is quite what they seem.

McFee gives us a Liston that is much pained by aspects of his own extraordinary story. We discover

that this ex-champion of the World could barely write his name. But perhaps the heart of his tragedy was that America would never let him escape the racist stereotype of a bad and threatening Black man. Incredibly, we find that the veteran civil rights organisation, the NAACP, did not want Liston to be given a shot at the world title because he apparently embodied the 'bad negro.' Even President Kennedy was apparently against the proposed title fight with the reigning champion Floyd Patterson because a Liston victory might set back the Civil Rights cause.

Liston somehow brought together the fears of White America: he had a criminal record, he had mob connections, he was physically intimidating, and his bulldozing boxing style lent itself to loaded words such as 'beast' or 'monster.'

McFee conveyed much of Liston's supposed menace, and indeed his tenderness, but also captured the poignancy of Liston's evolving awareness that America would only see him in one reductive and racist way. This was brought home with some anguish when Sonny reflected on what happened on the day after he had knocked out Patterson to become the champ. He returned to Philadelphia expecting huge crowds to welcome him – he even had a speech ready – only to find a handful of jaded reporters. Liston, it seems, could never be embraced by Americans: White or Black.

The final unwinding of the storyline was testing. I found myself wondering if the playwright hadn't stretched the plot to snapping point. Having said that, this short play opened up many questions about Liston's life. But perhaps its real achievement was to say so much more about what Malcolm X aptly called 'an American nightmare'.

THREE BLOODAXE POETS

Three poets will read at Hastings Bookshop at 7pm, Saturday 13 April 2024. All three, visiting Hastings, have new collections out in Bloodaxe books.

MATTHEW CALEY

Matthew Caley is a tutor/mentor for the Poetry School and has also recently taught poetry at the University of St Andrews, the University of Winchester and Royal Holloway University, London. *To Abandon Wizardry* is his seventh collection and his fourth with Bloodaxe.

AMALI GUNASEKERA

Amali Gunasekera was born and grew up in Sri Lanka. She works in the field of Archetypal Psychology. After living in Mozambique, Kenya and India, she is now based in Cumbria. Her second collection, *The Golden Thread*, was published by Bloodaxe in 2022.

ABIGAIL PARRY

Abigail Parry spent several years as a toymaker before completing a PhD on wordplay. Her poems have been set to music, translated into Spanish, Serbian and Japanese, and performed or exhibited in Europe, the Caribbean and the US. Her second collection, *I Think We're Alone Now*, was published by Bloodaxe Books in November 2023, and was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize in 2023.

An interview, full details, poems and pictures will appear in the next issue (249) of *Hastings Independent*. Meanwhile further details and books may be obtained from *The Hastings Bookshop*.

Eregata

VICTORIA KINGHAM at Hastings Contemporary's new Spring show

The spring and summer seasons at Hastings Contemporary promise to be the best yet both in terms of exhibitions and participatory activities. The gallery are thrilled that they have now been able to extend their half-price ticket offer to residents of the whole of the Rother area, with the aim of welcoming even more visitors. This spring they have 'Eregata', an exhibition of the work of the Ethiopian artist Elias Sime, and a special exhibition of works for sale, 'A Hundred Portraits' by long-time Hastings resident Quentin Blake.

Like much African art, the work of Elias Sime is, while internationally recognised, extremely patriotic. The colours of the Ethiopian flag are red, green, and yellow; Sime's work is intentionally predominantly red and green. It is perhaps significant to any artistic output from Ethiopia that some evidence suggests that *all* humans originate from a place close to Addis Ababa (Sime's home town) making all of us ultimately products of an ancient African diaspora.

AN APPROACH TO CALM
Sime aims through his work to approach *Eregata*, a word that in ancient Amharic translates to 'serene'. It is extraordinary then that to create this he has used a mass of electronic detritus – old keyboards, motherboards, electric wiring, casings – the ultimately disposable hardware enabling the worldwide clacking that we have now come to accept as the exchange of information. And his lovely, massive, tirelessly-worked creations do some-



Elias Sime at Zoma Museum 2023

how approach serenity. Part of the effect is achieved through the jigsaw-like regularity, perhaps predictability, of most of the designs. Sime adopts a collaborative approach and works with a team of studio assistants. Why not, when the components themselves, possibly made in China, have passed through hundreds of hands and probably dozens of countries to get to where they are? Each assistant can, for example, work with similar components on a complex rectangle of identical size, but each rectangle is therefore unique. The colours and the textures suggest topography (some of the works are made up of bits of old maps), the colours of the living earth, the friction of progress against, you could say, eternity. In this work, then, artefacts beginning as raw materials end up as part of a calming, illustrative dialogue between the old and the new,



Elias Sime: Tightrope Concave Triangle #2, 2020

the city and the earth, the nation and the globe. He isn't the first or the last artist to use recycled materials to make sculpture, but the end results – the maps, the landscapes, the global environmental references in the sculptures coupled with arranged crowds of earthen ceramics, put him on a par with the best.

100 NEW PORTRAITS
Quentin Blake's special exhibition consists of about 100 new portraits, all of which are original and all of which are for sale. At 91 he is still making art every day of his life and all of these, done in his unique, instantly-recognisable style, are new. As the patron of Hastings Con-

temporary he is supporting the gallery in its mission to bring world class art here for universal enjoyment.
Elias Sime – Eregata and Quentin Blake – A Hundred Portraits are on show at Hastings Contemporary from 16 March to 8 September 2024.

ARTS DIARY

INSTRUMENTALIST OF THE WORLD – INAUGURAL COMPETITION AND CONCERT
De La Warr Pavilion, 12 October, 7.00pm
Instrumentalist of the World Competition 2025 is a new international music competition for the world's finest young classical musicians. Its launch will be celebrated here in East Sussex with a spectacular orchestral concert. Featured will be the BBC Concert Orchestra, Grammy-nominated saxophonist Amy Dickson, and other globally-renowned artists to be announced. Tickets will shortly be on sale.

More details from Ian Roberts at instrumentalistoftheworld.com

REMI HARRIS – GYPSY JAZZ AND BLUES
Kino-Teatr, Saturday 20 April, 7.30pm
One of the UK's most exciting guitarists, Remi Harris is joined by Tom Moore (bass) and Chris Nesbitt (rhythm guitar) to present Gypsy Jazz and Blues. Combining musical virtuosity with passion and flair, the trio deliver a show inspired by diverse influences - Django Reinhardt, Peter Green, Wes Montgomery, Jimi Hendrix, Joe Pass. They have had stunning reviews from Jamie Cullum and from leading guitar magazines.

*Details: remiharris.com
Contact: Kino-Teatr, 43-49 Norman Road, 01424 457830*


INDIRA MAY DISCONNECTED TOUR
Barnaby's Lounge, Saturday 13 April, 7.30pm
St Leonards resident Indira May, an artist and singer-songwriter, will perform a one-off show at Barnaby's Lounge as part of their 2024 tour. She and artist Saffron are a dynamic collaboration that draws inspiration from a diverse range of musical legends, including D'angelo, Erykah Badu, Cookin Soul, Wayne Snow, and

More details at indiramay.bandcamp.com/track/trip and search Indira May on Facebook, Insta, and SoundCloud.

Nia Archives. Their unique blend of Jazz, Hip-Hop, and Electronic music has helped them attain the title of 'ones to watch'. They have already played at various festivals and their recent EP Disconnected has featured on several Spotify playlists.

LATER STONES
Lucy Bell Gallery, 23 March – 6 May
This captivating exhibition of photographs by the wonderful Brian Aris unveils rare and unseen images of The Rolling Stones in the early 1980s. Music enthusiasts and art aficionados alike are in for a treat, collated

between the gallery and Brian Aris during the Stones' iconic era.

More details: lucy-bell.com

ROOF-LESS
Author and artist Christopher Hoggin releases his latest book
Roof-less is an engaging illustrated book documenting a local autistic artist's first-hand experience of the housing crisis. From eviction to finally finding a new home after two-and-a-half years, experiencing his mother's death and an autism diagnosis, Christopher Hoggin is not a talker but felt the best way forward was to illustrate his nightmare.

Details at christopherhoggin-sartist.wordpress.com

Irish Film Week at the Kino

VICTORIA KINGHAM on a new film by Irish Director Pat Collins

This afternoon 45 or so people went to the Kino-Teatr in St Leonards to see a major film premiere. If this sounds interesting, it is even more interesting that the cinema is owned and managed by Olga Mamonova who must be one of very few Russians in the UK - or anywhere - to hold postgraduate qualifications in Irish literature. Once a year therefore the Kino holds an Irish film week, and this exceptional adaptation of John McGahern's critically lauded sixth and final novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, constituted a powerful start to the event.

The narrative of the film is simple. It's a year in the life of an Irish neighbourhood in Galway, seen through the eyes of a writer, Joe Rutledge (played by Barry Ward).

His wife Kate Rutledge (Anna Bed-erke) is a photographer. They have moved back to his home village to escape the London grind and live more authentically. They are well-regarded by the whole neighbourhood whom we meet, usually singly, on visits in successive seasons. It is 1984: the population is mainly ageing - it's significant that there is only one (working) child in the entire film, and no domestic pets, just working dogs. The kind of rural farming community that was dwindling then has, forty years later, largely disappeared.

PICTURESQUE PERFECT

The film stands alone as a work of great art, expressed simultaneously in content and in form. The cin-

ematography is by any standards outstanding. The breathtaking shots of Loch Nafoeey in Galway surround the characters and indicate the changing seasons. The same goes for the seasonal shots of the grassy lane up to the cottage of the principal characters. The scene takes are, one might say, classically picturesque. But there is a level of self-referentiality, of thematic unity, in both the dialogue and the narrative: while the characters build a summer house, for example (whose construction progresses

slowly throughout the year) one of the protagonists, Patrick Ryan (Lalor Roddy), looks through a frame of wooden slats, remarking that most people don't know that the view is even more beautiful framed than free. It's a telling moment that may refer to the frame of the summerhouse, the frame that the character holds, the fictional frame constituted by the film itself, the frame that limits and defines the characters, and possibly the Claude Glass, a frame that three hundred years ago was used by British tour-

ists newly viewing their own countryside, when the Picturesque was a fashionable thing among the Regency chattering classes.

More straightforwardly, the acting is fiercely compelling. This is one of the few films that has genuinely caused me to forget that the characters are well-known Irish actors. The effect is more than just the normal suspension of disbelief. They are gloriously portrayed; Irish country people with little money but great wisdom, little ceremony but depth of emotion, simplicity, and universality. I believed in them absolutely. Part of this achievement is down to director Pat Collins' careful capture of the spirit (though not the whole narrative) of McGahern's novel. Choosing the minimum of dialogue, he manages to convey the idea that sparsity was an indication of just how well they knew and loved one another: less is more. Gentler than the novel, but faithful to its aim, *That They May Face The Rising Sun* is unforgettable.

Further details can be found at [IMDb, imdb.com/title/tt2814309/](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2814309/), and at the distributors, [Breakout Pictures, breakoutpictures.com](https://www.breakoutpictures.com). *That They May Face The Rising Sun* is on general release from 1 April.

Neighbourhood Rock

One of Hastings' biggest musical names returns home after a busy week following the release of *There Goes The Neighbourhood*. HARRY HAWKINS takes in Kid Kapichi's fine performance at the White Rock

Kid Kapichi's third album in as many years, featuring Hastings-born legend Suggs, shows the group's ever-expanding ambition. It's an album of two halves. The first is punchy and powerful, the second more subtle and playful, with none of the political topics - or signature staggering riffs - being left out.

As support acts, Chimer and Bilk were well up to the task of setting the tone of the evening. Hastings natives Chimer's sound is enigmatic, with songs that swerve and build tension, through fearsome drumming and guitars chiming like their namesake. Their latest song, *Ricin*, was a particular highlight, a dark and stormy number with a powerful vocal presence from singer Connor Sims. Just one year since they were formed, I'm excited to see what's next for the group.

Essex band Bilk, also a power

trio, were next on stage. Fronted by the fast-paced vocals and guitar of Sol Abrahams, their songs fuse punk rhythms with engaging tales of nights out gone awry, with a punch and pace that reminds you of hip-hop. The choruses, in songs such as *Daydreamer* and *RNR*, highlighted Bilk's knack for tongue-in-cheek anthems.

Simply hearing the soundcheck before they head onto the stage, you can tell that Kid Kapichi will deliver a different scale of sound, the kick drum rumbling through the theatre floor. A sinister synth riff twists into the stomp of new album opener *Artillery*, and the band arrive to reams of applause from the Hastings crowd. The backline of amps were covered with three flags - of Ukraine, Palestine and European Union - which singer Jack Wilson refers to as causes bigger than the



PHOTOS: SARA LOUISE BOWREY

Downing street antics described in *The Party at No 10*. However, the consistency of theme and premise is kept clear with the song's gentle acoustic sway, as Jack sings "One rule for you/and another for them". This was hammered home once a seemingly impromptu chant of "Fuck the Tories" built into a rhythmic band jam.

Going through their catalogue, it is noticeable how the band's message builds into a cohesive ethos, such as tackling deprivation shown through the melody of fan favourite *Working Man's Town*, which began with an ominous football style chant. The anti-police roar of 999 was met with moshing from the centre crowd - far from the only song to raise such a response. Not to mention the fast-paced, addictively anarchic beat of *Rob the Supermarket*.

But big political gestures aren't the only thing Kapichi delivered. New album closer *Jimi*, dedicated to James Robert Read, who inspired many in the Hastings music scene, received rapturous attention as another, softer, reprieve. Likewise, *Zombie Nation* and *Special* provided dancier grooves, with lyrics highlighting the importance of grassroots and community connections, through music or wider society, lest we lose more music venues. In all, a fantastic evening.

Chimer play next at *The Albion* on 30 March. Details at [chimer.uk](https://www.chimer.uk). Bilk are playing at festivals across the UK this year. All dates: [bilk-band.co.uk](https://www.bilk-band.co.uk). Kid Kapichi world tour starts at Brighton, Concorde 2, on 29 March. See full tour at [kidkapichi.com](https://www.kidkapichi.com).



BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

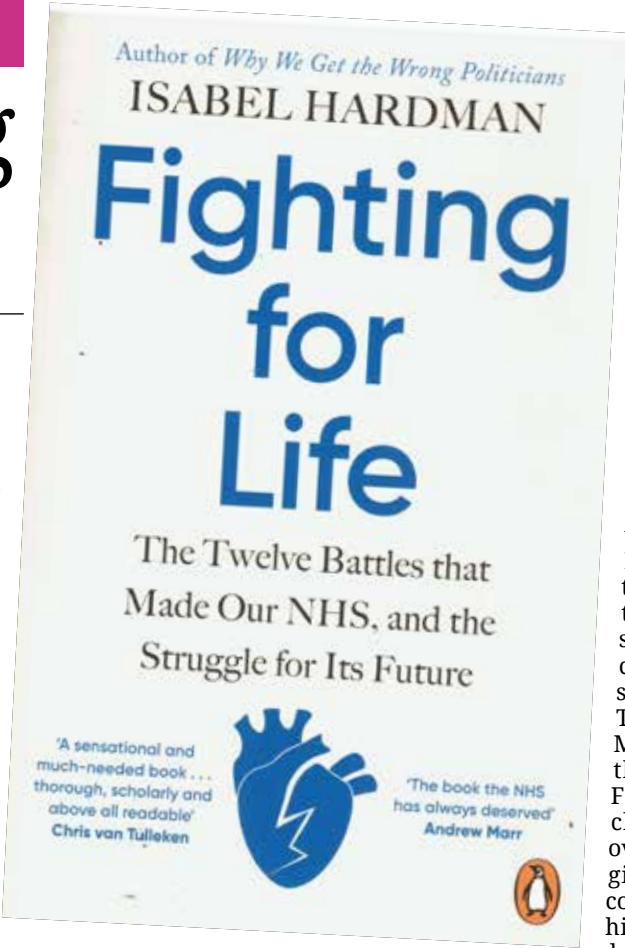
Fighting for Life

By Isabel Hardman
Published by Penguin,
rrp £10.99
REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

Edna Thomas gave birth to the first baby born under the aegis of the National Health Service, almost on the stroke of midnight July 5th 1948, the doctor urging her hold back until the clock struck. Her daughter was named Aneira after Labour MP Aneurin Bevan, often seen as the man that made the NHS happen. Previous to the founding of the NHS, there were already good medical services, but access was difficult to those without money.

As Aneira put it in her family biography, this new post-war miracle, access to health-care free at the point of use, meant a great deal. Hardman quotes this passage - 'If my father had been injured, we'd have starved. And if one of my siblings had fallen seriously, critically ill, they most likely would have succumbed to their sickness. Edna has lived with this knowledge all her life: hearing the stories of limbs withering away, cancers left untreated, hacking coughs slowly turning into something more sinister until, one day, they'd stop and there'd be silence.'

Hardman's book gives a detailed account of the context within which the NHS was formed and a history of hospitals in Britain before its founding. It is more complex than some might think, and compromised in many ways from day one. The famous Beveridge report laid the last foundation stones, and the post-war struggle to get the country back on its feet gave the opportunity to start building the NHS. Labour MP John Dugdale said that 'the purpose of victory is to live in a better



world than the old world'.

There was, despite the common view that Labour fought the Tories bitterly to get it done, actually a pretty wide cross-party consensus, with the greatest static coming from the British Medical Association. The devil, naturally, was in the details. One of the first compromises was to appease the BMA, thus 'consultants and GPs [were] allowed [...] to treat private patients in 'pay beds' in NHS hospitals, and the [GPs] to remain independent contractors.'

THE 76-YEAR HISTORY OF THE UPS AND DOWNS

Cost cutting exercises pretty much began on day one, too. Chancellor Stafford Cripps put great pressure on Bevan to cut spending; Hugh Gaitskill pushed for 'dentures and spectacles' to be excluded; and despite a wish on the part of both Bevan and Clement Atlee that 'no health charges would be imposed', prescription charges were very soon on the menu as well, and in 1949 a

shilling charge was imposed. In 1960 Enoch Powell raised it to 2 shillings, though to be fair he also 'regarded the NHS as an essential social service'. One wonders what Bevan and Atlee would think today, as charges approach £10?

Hardman talks of a 'fear of an existential crisis, which is always part of our relationship to the NHS'. Bevan having to go cap in hand to the Treasury was a sign of things to come. Her book is subtitled 'The Twelve Battles that Made Our NHS, and the Struggle for Its Future', and over 12 chapters, and a bit over 300 pages, she gives a sobering account of the 76-year history of the ups and downs the NHS has gone through.

One strand that typifies every decade since 1948 is the lack of capital, the choice between staff, equipment, or premises. Hospitals post-war were in a sorry state, and house-building trumped NHS funding. A plan to build large regional hospitals saw the closure of much local provision. The 1960s vogue for brutalist architecture saw concrete monstrosities that succumbed all too quickly to 'concrete cancer'. The AIDS crisis is covered in some detail, as well, as is, naturally, Covid.

THE BIGGEST FIRE SALE SINCE THATCHER

The book looks at the low priority mental health has always been given, and describes the problems caused in the 1990s by the shift towards 'care in the community', with Minister of State for Health, John Hutton, famously saying that it had become 'couldn't care less in the community'. Hardman also gives a nuanced account of the labour

shortages the NHS perennially struggles with, and that sees a regular influx of immigrant labour to take up the slack.

When I worked in the further education sector, in student services, I noted with surprise the very small number of students expressing an interest in nursing or medical qualifications, instead opting for childcare, health and beauty, or hairdressing. When I was their age a much larger cohort aspired to nursing and medical careers. The consequences of that shift are, frankly, terrifying, especially when one considers the demographic shifts that are occurring. But, one way or another, 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'...

Government after government reorganised the service, adding new structures and new layers of management. The chapter 'Control freaks' says it all. Blair's PFI funding privatised hospital builds, and saw an increase in newbuilds, done on the cheap, with the finance creating mountains of debt for future generations, whilst once again pitching funding for staff, beds and other equipment up against construction. Not least, the contractors knocking down old buildings to build one new one often sold the land for profit to private developers, a subject covered in George Monbiot's excellent *Captive State*, and a phenomenon familiar in the more recent academisation of education.

The post-2008 Tory assaults on the NHS have left a tattered framework visible to the public, but with a bare cupboard. Jeremy Hunt comes in for some particular hatred

by many of us, and rightly so. The pandemic and Brexit seem to have weaponised the sale of our assets, in what is clearly the biggest fire-sale since Thatcher.

THE NHS STOPS AND THERE IS SILENCE?

'Just because a national health service was inevitable by the time 1945 came along doesn't mean it will inevitably service', says the author. Here is the 'first 'nationalised' NHS patient, ' Sylvia Beckingham, thirteen' with a liver condition, 'surrounded not just by nurses but also by the Minister for Health, photographers and reporters: 'Mr Bevan asked me if I understood the significance of the occasion and told me that it was a milestone in history – the most civilised step any country had ever taken. I had earwigged at adults' conversations and I knew that this was a great change that was coming about and that most people could hardly believe this was happening.'

As our politicians give lip-service to 'Our NHS' whilst stabbing it in the back and allowing in, by stealth, Americanised health insurance et cetera, do we, today, 'understand the significance'? Will we, when it finally is dissolved into the private sector and many of us find ourselves, like Aneira's forebears, succumbing to our sickness in poverty, 'hardly believe' it is happening when one day, the NHS stops and there is silence?

Fighting for Life is available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road, Hastings TN34 1RE, 01424 539726

CROSSWORD CORNER

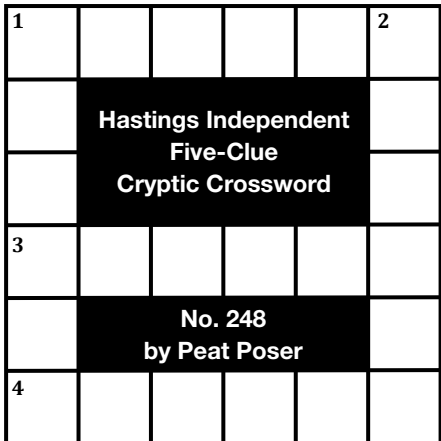
Across

1. Festival in the feast era (6)
3. Noble go lacking energy and not square (6)
4. Here it turns into one or the other (6)

Down

1. Reveal former model (6)
2. Call with hesitation this lookalike (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List



POETRY CORNER

J.L.B
ANON
(Inspired by article on John Logie Baird in HIP 234)

Transmitting motion
direct in another space
in time.

Magic man
Barefoot inventor
Denying physical needs
in pursuit of miracles
made out of wood, buss bars and
biscuit tins.

The inventor, the
man we didn't quite grasp
till he was gun from
the circus of life
that we are still on T.V.

POETRY CORNER CORRECTION

In Issue 247 the featured poem was wrongly titled and accredited to Danny Goring.
The correct title should have read Monday in Hastings written by Tim Barlow.
My sincere apologies to both Tim and Danny for this mix-up.
Pete Donohue
Literature editor

Every Good Boy (and Girl) Deserves Flavour

FIONA MCGARRY speaks to **Kimberley Duke**, co-founder of **Life Kitchen**: a cookery school providing free classes showing people how to tackle taste loss after illness

Amongst other things that come up during my conversation with Kimberley Duke is what she's been up to since recently moving to the Hastings area. She tells me she has started to create beach/street food – think taste-laden loaded fries and pastries – and plans to sell it on the St Leonards promenade in collaboration with Jeremy and Justine of 'Barista and the Shack'. She also runs a micro-bakery and is head chef at The New Inn in Sidley (seasonal European food).

Kim is clearly someone who likes to have her fingers in several pies (or pastries). But after hearing about her amazing project, Life Kitchen, I was particularly keen to learn about this not-for-profit cookery school she co-founded together with author and cook, Ryan Riley.

The ethos of Life Kitchen is to help people whose taste has been affected by cancer or who have an altered sense of taste due to Covid. Their focus is on enjoyment more than health: creating tastes and flavours that help people to really enjoy food again.

Audacity and spontaneity seem to have been key elements in Kim and Ryan's lives. They were good childhood friends, and after Ryan won £28,000 at a casino, they moved to London and both worked in publishing until they managed, on a whim, to get a food stall in Camden Market. A few years later, Kim, who was particularly interested in taste and flavour, trained as a head chef.

Both had lost parents to cancer, and with them in mind, they wanted to help people suffering from illness rekindle their pleasure in food. Professor Barry Smith, founder/head of the Centre for the Study of the Senses at the University of London, advised them on choosing ingredients for people living with an altered sense of taste. The result was their cookery school, which runs free cookery classes.

Although Kim and Ryan's work originally had cancer sufferers in mind, the Covid pandemic broadened their focus. They adapted their strategy for an emerging class of smell-challenged eaters and devised "a range of recipes and products helpful for people living with a lessened sense of taste for whatever reason." They worked with the 'Altered Eating' group and attracted support from Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Sue Perkins among others – and wrote a recipe book: *Taste and Flavour*.

Life Kitchen has also designed a range of products for Holland & Barrett. These are grouped according to the five tastes – sweet, sour, salt, bitter and umami. They include seed, kale and wasabi seasoning, miso and raspberry white chocolate (dangerously more-ish) and miso honey (the umami of the miso adds a boost to the sweetness of the honey).

According to Kim, they use five elements: aroma, umami, texture, layering and food sensations to create their recipes. "There are certain ingredients and methods that just work: umami is 'one of the big ones', as well as ingredients that stimulate the trigeminal nerve." That's the nerve that connects your nose, eyes, and mouth and is important in chewing and swallowing. "Even if you're experiencing a loss of taste, you can still get a sensation from some ingredients like mint, wasabi and horseradish," she explains.

Umami can be used for a base layer with some trigeminal stimulation, and a mix of hot and cold ingredients are also helpful. For example, umami tomatoes with garlic and cream cheese (cold) on a flatbread (hot) has got all of those layers.

The recipe here (soon to be available at Barista and the Shack) is another taste explosion and a favourite of Kim's. It creates nostalgia for her childhood when "getting a peshwari naan bread from the local



Indian restaurant was the absolute highlight of culinary joy".

PESHWARI SWIRLS

You will need:

For the mapled cream kale:

- 2 tbsp flavourless oil
- 2 onions finely chopped
- 3cm piece of fresh ginger peeled and chopped
- 6 garlic cloves finely chopped
- 300g kale tough stems removed and sliced into 1cm strips
- 1½ tsp + 1 tsp garam masala
- 1½ tsp + 1 tsp ground coriander
- 4 tbsp maple syrup or honey
- 200ml double cream
- 150g paneer cut into 1cm cubes
- 50g ground almonds
- 50g desiccated coconut

For the pastry:

- 7 sheets spring roll pastry
- 1 egg lightly beaten
- 1-2 tsp nigella seeds (optional)

Method:

1. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over low heat. Add the onions, ginger, garlic and season with salt. Fry for 7-8 mins until the onions have softened and then tip the mixture into a bowl.
2. Immediately tip the kale into the
3. frying pan, season and fry over a high heat, stirring occasionally, for 8-10 mins. Add a splash of water and cook for 4-5 more mins until tender. Add the onion mixture back into the pan.
4. Once most of the liquid has evaporated, add the garam masala and coriander and cook for 1-2 mins to toast the spices. Then add the maple syrup or honey and paneer and stir in the cream. Cook for 4-5 mins to warm through, then season with salt and pepper to taste. Use 200g of the mixture for the pastries.
5. Place 1 pastry sheet on a clean

Note: The leftover mapled cream kale can be used to make a delicious toasted sandwich with mature cheddar cheese and mango chutney or eaten on its own (It will keep for up to three days in an airtight container in the fridge.) Heat the oven to 180°C fan / Gas 6 and then bake the almonds and coconut on a baking tray for 4-6 mins, until golden brown.

work surface and brush the left edge with beaten egg.

6. Divide the peshwari filling into 7 equal portions. Spoon the first portion in a sausage shape along the edge of the pastry closest to you, leaving a 2cm border. Then carefully fold the pastry edge nearest you over the filling and roll up the pastry so the filling is fully enclosed. Curve the pastry roll to form a spiral 'swirl'.
7. Repeat with the 6 remaining sheets of pastry and portions of filling.
8. Place the swirls on a baking sheet lined with greaseproof paper and brush them with more beaten egg. Finish with a sprinkling of nigella seeds if using. Bake the swirls for 30-35 mins until golden.

This recipe is from *Weekly Provisions: How to Eat Seasonally and Love What's Left Over* by Kim Duke (Penguin Random House)



Find out more about Life Kitchen on lifekitchen.co.uk or facebook.com/LifeKitchenCookery or on instagram: [@lifekitchencookery](https://www.instagram.com/lifekitchencookery)

@lifekitchencookery

FOOTBALL

The Business End of the Season

HASTINGS UTD 1,
CHATHAM TOWN 1

HASTINGS UTD 1,
HORNCHURCH 0

HORSHAM 2,
HASTINGS UTD 1

HUGH SULLIVAN

Hastings United played three of the top four sides in the Isthmian League in an eight-day spell over the past fortnight. Each match was fiercely contested, with the outcome uncertain until the final whistle. The ‘U’s’ eventual haul of four points from a win, a draw and a defeat will have felt scant reward for their efforts, as they ended last Saturday back in ninth place, six points adrift of a play-off place. But with eight league games left, including two over the Easter weekend against sides near the bottom of the league table, there’s still everything to play for.

On 16 March, before a crowd of over 2,200 at the Pilot Field, second-placed Chatham were a hard nut to crack, and the home side seemed

to have to settle for a point in a 0-0 draw when Tommy Fagg was sent off with over 20 minutes still to go following a multi-player confrontation. The sending-off was “harsh” according to manager Chris Agutter, though Fagg has shown a tendency to play on a short fuse.

Be that as it may, United went ahead in the 86th minute courtesy of an own goal by a Chatham defender, not to concede an equaliser in the third minute of added time.

HORNCHURCH DEFEATED Three days later, top-of-the-table visitors Hornchurch arrived with a record of just one defeat in 32 league matches. Leading their attack was Femi Akinwande, who started the season banging in the goals for Hastings but transferred to the Essex side in October.

On the night he was kept quiet by the home pairing of Sam Crutwell and Sam Gale, playing immaculately together in central defence. At the other end, the ‘U’s’ prolific scorer Davide Rodari was also drawing blanks. But in the 89th minute he found space to cross to the far post for Fagg to score the winner to spark jubilation amongst



Davide Rodari (in white) in action against Horsham

ISTHMIAN LEAGUE - PREMIER DIVISION

		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	PTS
1	Hornchurch	34	25	7	2	84	26	+58	82
2	Chatham Town	36	22	5	9	75	51	+24	71
3	Enfield Town	35	17	10	8	62	48	+14	61
4	Horsham	34	18	7	9	49	39	+10	61
5	Wingate & Finchley	34	18	5	11	62	54	+8	59
6	Carshalton Athletic	36	15	10	11	64	49	+15	55
7	Dulwich Hamlet	35	15	10	10	67	53	+14	55
8	Billerica Town	36	17	4	15	59	46	+13	55
9	Hastings United	34	15	8	11	58	46	+12	53

both players and supporters.

Last Saturday, Hastings travelled to Horsham, who had beaten them 2-0 in the reverse fixture in early February. The West Sussex side dominated the first half. They went ahead from a spot-kick in the 12th minute, conceded by Jordy Mongoy, a recent returnee to the United ranks following a spell as a 19-year-old at the Pilot Field in 2018/19. His foul on the edge of the penalty area was adjudged to have been committed just inside it. The lead was then doubled with a goal from another former Hastings striker, Daniel Ajakaiye.

The ‘U’s came out for the second half with much greater verve and attacking intent. Crutwell pulled a goal back, having nutmegged a defender, and drilled his low shot past the Horsham goalkeeper. After that, with Jack Dixon, Freddie Legg and Will Harley successively brought on as substitutes, it was end-to-end stuff. Further scoring opportunities were created at either end, with a final opening made for Rodari by Dixon in added time. It was the sort of chance he has been netting all season, but this one he put narrowly wide, and Horsham survived to win 2-1 and cement their place in the top four.

Today (Good Friday) Hastings play away against Haringey Borough, then entertain Folkestone Invicta on Easter Monday in a game which will surely have the Pilot Field buzzing with a large home crowd. There’s also a Sussex Senior Cup final in the offing. It’s popularly described as the business end of the season.

ATHLETICS – HALF MARATHON

Bright Day Turns Tough

The weather for the 40th Hastings Half Marathon last Sunday was bright and sunny – a little ironic for the majority of the 2,500+ runners who have had to train for the event over days, weeks, even months of unseasonal rain.

The long uphill climb along Harley Shute Road and Queensway, the sapping middle section of the Ridge and Ore heights, the clattering downhill slalom through the Old Town, are all more comfortably done in the dry, and the more clapping and cheering spectators, the better. But the element which many with previous experience of the course will have dreaded was still there waiting for them: that strong westerly headwind which makes the final stretch all along Hastings and St Leonards sea-front the toughest of finishes.

For some performers, the conditions meant improved times. The winner, Seyfa Jamaal of London

Heathside, clocked the 13-mile course in 1:06:48, more than four minutes quicker than last year’s joint champions Charlie Brisley and Adam Clarke, and indeed the fastest time over the course since 2016, in an era when the race was dominated by visiting Kenyan runners.

Top local competitor Ross Skelton of Hy Hastings claimed the runner-up prize in 1:07:31. Rhys Boorman of Hastings Athletics Club (HAC) came in sixth this year as opposed to fifth in 2023 but improved his time from 1:12:35 to 1:11:53.

However, in the women’s race, winner Grace Baker was actually around a minute and a half slower than last year when she finished third. But her 2024 time of 1:21:13 was enough to beat next woman home, Rachael Mulvey of Hy Hastings, who was the 2022 champion, by almost five minutes. Grace described the race as “very tough”,



and said she didn’t care too much about the time, she was just pleased to get home victorious to the embrace of her sister and young niece.

The Nice Work race management team ran the event with commendable professionalism, led by race director Rachael Wood. As always, though, they were hugely dependent on the support of unpaid volunteer route marshals, pacers, water station operators, refreshment providers, computer processors and others. The Lions Club of Hastings expects to have raised serious sums for charitable causes as well as providing the forum for many participants’ own personal charities.