



Inside:
Your Pull Out
Guide to What
is Happening
in and Around
Hastings



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FLOOD REPORT BLAMES RAIN, TIDE...

AND SOUTHERN WATER

HUGH SULLIVAN

previous devastating inundation in January 2023.

As anticipated, the report concludes that, while it happened in the context of very high local rainfall and a high tide, the principal cause was the failure of Southern Water to seal the manhole at South Terrace, adjacent to Priory Meadow shopping centre, which was their responsibility.

Ardent had confirmed in an interim report in April last year, following the first flood, that this manhole should be effectively sealed. But according to the addendum to this report released last week, it was not until 4 October – more than five months later – that a contractor was allocated by Southern Water to do it. An application to the county council highways de-

partment for requisite permission to close the highway was still to be made when the second flood took place on 28 October.

Two days later, on 30 October, Southern Water undertook works to remove the manhole altogether under an emergency notice.

Up to 55.5mm (2.2 inches) rainfall was recorded in Hastings over a 13-hour period of 27-28 October,

described by Ardent as a 1-in-25 year probability. It followed a previous period of 17 days in which there was 104.4mm rainfall (4.1 inches), so that the upstream catchment was already saturated and the volume of surface water run-off therefore maximised.

The heaviest rainfall also coincided with high tide. Ardent conclude that this “may have

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A report commissioned by East Sussex County Council into the flooding of Hastings Town Centre in October last year has been delivered by consulting engineers Ardent. This was the second major flood within ten months after a



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Try to forget for a moment that the country is going to hell in a hand-cart, largely because profit has been given primacy over people. Also, that Hastings residents have been both deprived of water and drowned in sewage (not yet poisoned, but give them time) and our roads and pavements reduced to a dangerous and damaging obstacle course.

Instead, turn to page eight of the paper and consider - better still, visit and actively enjoy - the diverse range of wildlife and nature treats available in and around the town. Should that include taking your mutt for a walk on the beach - Hastings is arguably the South Coast's most dog-friendly town - best check out our news pages first and bone up (ouch!) on the local bylaws.

Elsewhere, this issue previews and reviews a wealth of art events and music gigs while lamenting the loss of popular local venue St Mary in the Castle and suggesting ways to resurrect it.

HIP also looks at Barefoot Opera's latest ambitious project, while, on the literature page, we consider the Dale Vince (owner of Ecotricity) book on prospective ways to green Britain.

Happy reading!

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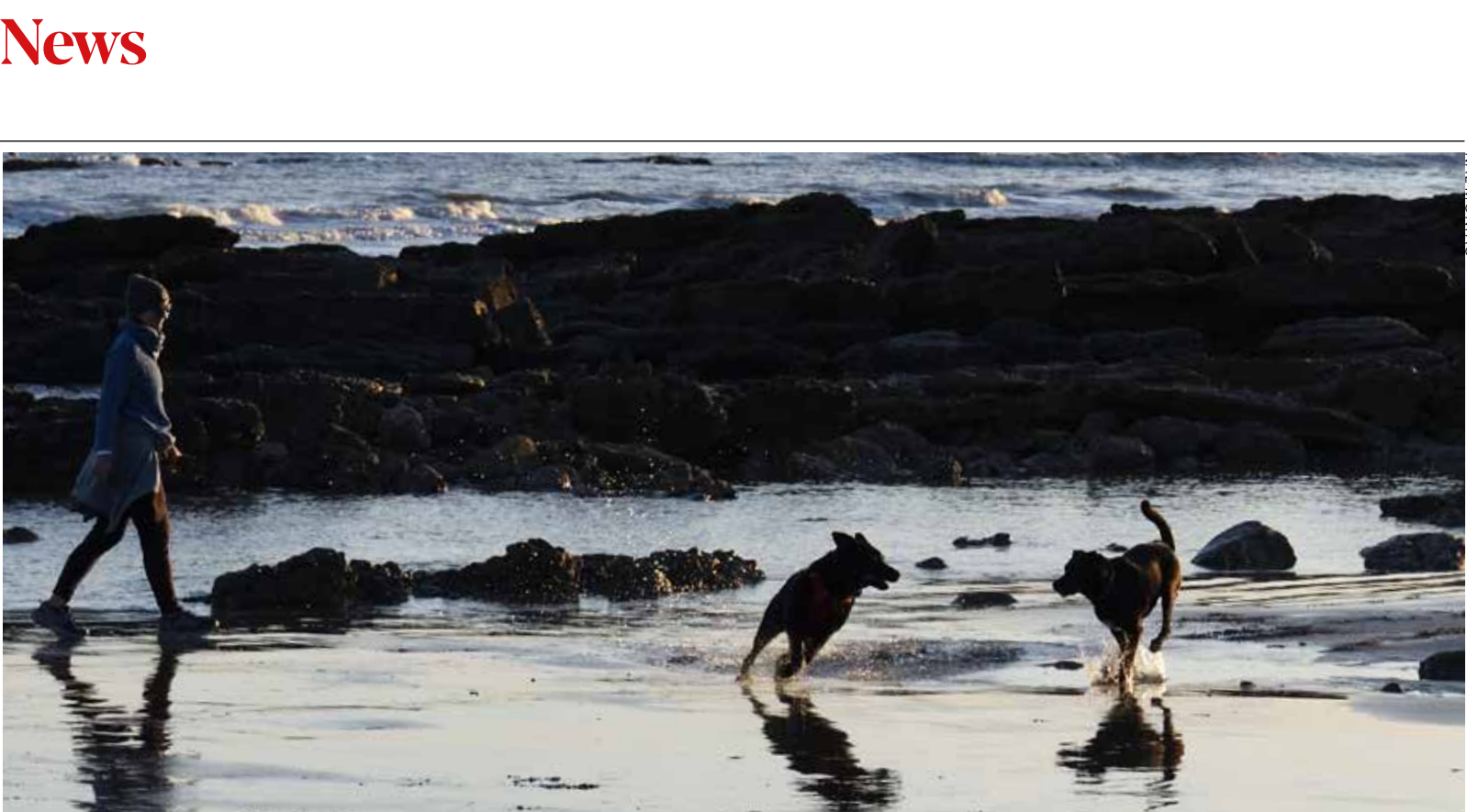
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Challenge to Dog Exclusion Zone on Stade Beach

HUGH SULLIVAN

The extent of the dog control public space protection order (PSPO), which has limited the exercising of dogs on beaches, parks and green spaces across the borough since it came into force on 1 April, is being challenged by the town's dog-owners.

The zone of contention is Stade Beach, also known as Rock-a-Nore Beach, the foreshore east of the harbour arm. A petition started on change.org by local resident Anne Pottle has gathered over 1,500 signatories objecting to the banning of dogs here during the summer months.

She claims that this is a working beach, where fishermen's dogs are

free to roam without restrictions. It is also the only effective exercise area of the Old Town which can be accessed by local dog-walkers without making arduous ascents and descents of the hills on either side.

The petition urges Hastings Borough Council (HBC) to reconsider the terms of the PSPO, allowing dogs access to Stade Beach all year round. "Please sign", it concludes, "if you believe in a more inclusive Hastings where everyone – including our four-legged friends – can enjoy what our beautiful town has to offer."

For the moment, at least in theory, anyone who breaches any of the restrictions may be liable for an on-the-spot fine of £100 or prosecution in court.

PREVIOUS CONSULTATION

The prospective terms of the PSPO, insofar as they would affect future beach use, were reviewed by HBC's charities committee back in January 2023 in its role as trustee of the Foreshore Trust. The committee members, which included then cabinet members John Cannan, Judy Rogers and Andy Batsford, were told that a new order was needed to replace a previous regime which had lapsed in June 2020.

Their attention was drawn to a town-wide public consultation undertaken the previous autumn eliciting 835 responses (described as one of the highest responses to any recent consultation). Of these, 601 "specifically opposed" increased restrictions; another 114 advised they felt the old restrictions - which did not extend to Stade Beach - "seemed correct and fair"; and only 74 approved. But Cllr Rogers argued in the committee meeting that the beach east of the harbour arm was "really being used by families" and should be included in the restrictions. Cllr Batsford, declaring himself as "dog-owner and user of said beach" also spoke in support, and the committee agreed to include it without further discussion.

Two months later, the matter came before the HBC cabinet. Cllr Rogers told her colleagues that the charities committee sought inclusion of "Rock-a-Nore Beach" within the restricted zone. No one objected. The terms were then unanimously agreed to take effect for three years, subject to a review after 12 months. The then council leader Paul Barnett explained at the time that a formal legal procedure for issuing the orders would need to be followed, but he said they would "hopefully" come into effect "by the summer".

In fact, no order was drawn in 2023, an omission explained last week by a council spokesperson as "due to officer workload and resources, and the need for these to be focused on the council's financial situation". The new regulations came into effect only on 1 April this year.

ENFORCEMENT

Asked whether they are now being enforced, the spokesperson said: "We are working on educating people about the restrictions and identifying which areas need additional signage. There have been two fixed penalty notices issued since the restrictions came into force."

The newly elected council, of somewhat changed political complexion, clearly needs to grapple with the issue again. Leader Julia Hilton was quoted by BBC Radio Sussex earlier this month as saying that she was "pursuing legal advice about holding a [further] public consultation," which would "have to balance the views of dog owners with the views of people who don't have dogs and want to enjoy the beach".

It sounds as if she intends this to happen without waiting for the expiry of the initial 12-month period. However, even if this consultation were to be set in motion promptly, it would, on previous form, be unlikely to come up with any conclusions before the summer season is fully upon us.

HASTINGS TIDES						
DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES			SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 24 MAY	L7:07am	H12:18pm	L7:25pm	4:56	8:53	
SAT 25 MAY	H0:31am	L7@42am	H12@54pm	4:55	8:54	
SUN 26 MAY	H1:08am	L8:15am	H1:35pm	4:54	8:55	
MON 27 MAY	H1:50am	L8:50am	H2:21pm	4:53	8:57	
TUES 28 MAY	H2:38am	L9:31am	H3:11pm	4:52	8:58	
WED 29 MAY	H3:37am	L10:19am	H4:07pm	4:51	8:59	
THURS 30 MAY	H4:43am	L11:16am	H5:08pm	4:50	9:00	THIRD
FRI 31 MAY	H5:53am	L12:24pm	H6:16pm	4:49	9:01	
SAT 1 JUNE	L1:02am	H7:03am	L1:37pm	4:49	9:02	
SUN 2 JUNE	L2:13am	H8:07am	L2:43pm	4:48	9:03	
MON 3 JUNE	L3:18am	H9:04am	L3:43pm	4:47	9:04	
TUES 4 JUNE	L4:16am	H9:57am	L4:40pm	4:47	9:05	
WED 5 JUNE	L5:13am	H10:48am	L5:34pm	4:46	9:06	
THURS 6 JUNE	L6:07am	H11:39am	L6:25pm	4:45	9:07	NEW

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

PHOTOS: STUART GRIFFITHS



Southern Water – Another Day, Another Mess

KATE SHAW

There is real public outrage about the sewage pollution in our seas and rivers. Last Saturday (18 May) communities around the UK came together in a national day of protest to send a message to water companies that enough is enough. Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) were amongst them.

Most sewage systems in the UK are combined, carrying both sewage and surface water run-off. During periods of intense rainfall, sewer capacity can become overloaded. When it does, treatment plants cannot cope with the increased volume of wastewater, and so are bypassed. and an untreated mix of

sewage and water is released via combined sewer overflows (CSOs). Although the sewage is heavily diluted, the effluent is untreated and can pose a serious health risk.

Last year these CSOs discharged 824 times a day around the UK. Originally intended to release during periods of heavy rainfall, many of these discharges were when there was no rainfall at all, and it has become clear that water companies are using them far beyond their original use.

Along the East Sussex coastline, the company responsible is Southern Water. Jemima Gibbons, protest lead for SAS (Hastings), says that it has failed for 30 years or more to invest in an infrastructure which needs maintenance that it's just not providing.

At the time of writing, Hastings alone has had 139 sewage alerts so far this year; St Leonards tops that with 181. Add to those the 150 alerts that Bexhill has suffered and you get a whopping 470 along our little stretch of coastline alone. The story continues around the rivers and coastline of the UK.

Over the next month, Ofwat, the financial regulators of the water industry, will be reviewing the water companies' business plans for the next five years. SAS want them to end sewage pollution in popular bathing spots by 2030.

And, with a general election looming, Jemima argues that this is the perfect time to shout about it.

On the day I wrote this, I went to meet my friend Will for a swim below the seafront at St Leonards. We got up to our knees and I can only describe the feeling as like standing in soup. We looked at each other and he said to me "I don't think I fancy this." I had to agree, and returned home to a hot shower.

Of course, two weeks ago I wouldn't have been able to do this, as ours was one of the 30,000 or so homes left completely without water for days. Who was responsible for that? Southern Water, again.

1 contributed to the flooding through tidal locking of the culverted watercourse outfall".

Following the flood event, Southern Water installed ten temporary pumps on Denmark Place to pump water from this culverted watercourse towards the sea at Pelham Beach so as to reduce the risk of water backing up. They indicate that they have also made a repair to a flap valve upstream of the Pelham outfall pipe, and that, following this, the pumps will be "removed shortly".

However, the "surcharging manhole" on South Terrace is described as the primary source, not only of the majority of the surface water flooding but also of several town centre basements being deluged, as the capacity of the sewer network was overwhelmed.

'DECREASE OF RISK'

The report concludes that the actions undertaken since 28 October by Southern Water would "decrease the [future] risk of this scale of flooding occurring, in a similar flood area".

Southern Water's spokesperson issued a statement last Friday: "We welcome the publication of this report. As it makes clear, multiple

factors were involved in the 2023 flooding events, and different areas of the town underwent localised flooding for different reasons. Although we do not agree with all aspects of the report, we will review its findings carefully as we are working closely with the agencies who have responsibility for flood management in the town to help to prevent incidents like this happening in the future."

Many business owners and residents are unimpressed, feeling that a number of questions remain unanswered. A source from Love Hastings Ltd, which represents town centre businesses, has indicated disappointment at lack of calculations or estimates for water flow rates, failure to comment on the adequacy of Southern Water's pumping solutions, and at the scant attention paid to residential properties affected by sewer flooding. Love Hastings advocates "comprehensive solutions", including re-engineering the culvert's final stretch and reinstating an emergency outflow for the town centre.

They also highlight the failure of Southern Water to compensate for losses incurred in the January flood despite some pay-outs for the October repeat.

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Hastings Commons Renovations On Track

Hastings Commons (HC) has released an up-to-date report on their major renovation works at three properties: 12 Claremont, Eagle House and the rooftop of the Observer Building (OB). Planning permission has been obtained for all three projects, contractors have been appointed, and each project is intended to be completed by the end of March next year.

12 Claremont was built in 1870 as the Claremont Rooms, used initially for various community meetings and activities before becoming an early base for the FJ Parsons newspaper empire, then Hastings' first telephone exchange. Two decades ago, it was restored to become the birthplace of Project Art Works, but has been empty since 2016 when plans by East Sussex County Council to extend the next-door library were abandoned.

The HC renovation, funded by awards from the Towns Fund, Community Ownership Fund and Historic England, has been designed by nationally renowned heritage architects Purnell to become an "inclusive and accessible" creative hub. It will include a gallery space run by Project Art Works and an

artist workspace managed by Hastings Art School. There will also be an international hosting and learning centre on the first floor, run by Jericho Road Solutions, for people from across the country and the world "to learn about commoning and community-led regeneration".

The builders are Buxton Building Contractors Ltd, who have a long track record in heritage projects across the South-East. Their recent renovation contracts elsewhere have included Eastgate House in Rochester, Stanmer Park in Brighton and properties in Harley Street, London.

Buxton are also the contractors for the renovation of Eagle House, built originally in 1867 and used for most of its history as a furniture and furnishings showroom; at one time it became a second-hand department for Debenhams. From next year, the building will resume its role as a community hub, with a focus on provision for young people. The Common Room first opened as a public living room in September 2021 with a youth club added in October 2023. Both uses will return to the ground floor. The rest of the building will cater for the Hastings

Youth Commons, providing spaces for interaction, learning and support for those aged 11-18. There will be office space for local youth workers and youth organisations, and income-generating spaces to subsidise ongoing youth work.

Over at the OB, where the lower floors of the one-time printworks have already been transformed into workspaces, a creative technology hub and the Crossfit Gym, contractors 8Build are extending their work to the roof. When completed, an accessible public roof terrace will provide extensive views over Hastings, with a bar at the southern end of the building. There will also be a new floor built on top of the bar area for youth work. The main works are due to be completed by Christmas. Early next year, the bar will be fitted and gardens planted ready for intended public opening by April.

Kit Godfrey, HC's Deputy General Manager and project lead for 12 Claremont and Eagle House said earlier this month: "I worked on the development of Eagle House and 12 Claremont for nearly three years before finally seeing a contractor on site. It's incredibly exciting see-



CAROLINE HUGHES

Interior of 12 Claremont

ing projects that felt quite abstract for so long finally beginning to take shape in a tangible way. For me, the excitement comes from knowing we will deliver proper restorations of historic buildings in Hastings, but also watching the users of the buildings make them their own."

Mayor Margi Takes Labour Lead

Following the local election at the beginning of this month, as reported in HIP 251, the political parties now represented on Hastings Borough Council hold numbers of seats as follows:

- Greens.....12
- Labour.....8
- Ex-Labour Independent Group.....6
- Conservatives.....5
- Ex-Conservative Independent 1

It is reasonable to assume that Green leader Cllr Julia Hilton, now heading the largest body of councillors, will continue as council leader. At the time of going to press, no announcement has been made, either by her or anybody else, as to how her cabinet will be composed, or whether indeed the cabinet system is to continue. However, she has expressed, post-election, an intention to develop closer working relationships with other parties. "We campaigned on the basis of wanting a much more collaborative and cooperative council", she said, "and we will be undertaking negotiations with other parties on that basis."

In the meantime, the Labour Party has elected current mayor, Cllr Margi O'Callaghan, as their new leader, following the unseating of former councillor Heather Bishop, who had only been in the role since January. Heather Kay, freshly elected as councillor for Wishing Tree, will be deputy party leader.

Cllr O'Callaghan's elevation marks a further ascent in her personal snakes-and-ladders political

career. In 2018 she was elected as councillor for Silverhill, and two years later took office as Chair of the Charity Committee in the cabinet of then council leader Kim Forward. In 2021 she lost her council seat, defeated by Conservative candidate Lucian Fernando (who later joined Reform UK), but in 2022, she was re-selected to contest the Braybrooke ward and won easily.

Cllr Paul Barnett did not restore her to his cabinet, but she became chair of the council's planning committee. A year later, in May 2023, she was unanimously elected mayor. With Labour no longer commanding an overall majority, she found herself in a position on more than one occasion to use the casting vote given her by this role to exercise it in favour of her party's motion – and didn't hesitate to do so. Chaiing the most recent full council meeting on 20 March she controversially brought proceedings to a halt when members of the public were seeking to protest over Palestinian issues.

She described her mayoral position then as "non-political". In her new role, not so much.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

GOODBYE AND THANK YOU

Dear HIP
My husband and I ended up staying in East Sussex with our daughter due to the war in our home country, Ukraine. We want to say big thank-you to British people for the hospitality and support we met here. Especially health service in Sussex was an amazing experience. High level of professionalism and attitude of care helped us to feel safe. Our family doctor at the Northiam Surgery was exceptionally kind and caring.
Now, after two years, we are on our way back to Ukraine, missing our home country too much. We hope one day to see our garden in Kherson and come to visit the UK as ordinary guests.
Mrs Valentyna Herzon

We would love to hear from you.

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📷 instagram.com/hastingsindependent

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



Southern Housing Action leafletting at Asda, Silverhill

A Broadcast from Southern Housing

MERLIN BETTS

As I walk through the mud of Church Wood on my way to Tilekiln Community Centre, that cool evening air paying no attention to the sun's beating rays, Paul Hackett is at his desk. Or maybe he's just getting out of his car, firing off some quick emails, extending a magic hand and the car squeaks and locks. And maybe, as he heads up to his office, he's reflecting on what Gustave Flaubert once wrote, "I have always tried to live in an ivory tower, but a tide of shit is beating at its walls, threatening to undermine it."

It's 24 April and Southern Housing's executives – including their chief Paul Hackett – have agreed to meet with a number of Hastings residents, on Zoom. For those who would struggle to Zoom at home, Southern Housing Action are setting up a projector at Tilekiln, to give access to as many people as possible.

Southern Housing proudly proclaims, "We're one of the largest housing providers in the UK... [housing] over 167,000 people." When the bosses decided to stoop down and video call with the people of Hastings – a blip on their map of Sussex – they had no idea how ill-informed and negligent they have been, or maybe they didn't care. A damning report from the Housing Ombudsman on 14 May will say their complaints-handling procedures, amongst other things, are utterly inadequate, giving an overall mal-

administration rate of 79% for cases examined, and 92% for cases regarding complaints-handling.

Paul comes on screen at Tilekiln. The connection is a bit shaky. Cllr Maya Evans (now former Cllr) sits on my left. Around 15 people are in the hall, and despite the centre's warm name, we haven't managed to get the heating on. For residents who've been forcibly acclimatised to damp, mould, sewage water leaking into their homes, and doors that won't lock... a bit of chill isn't going to stop them. About 50 tenants will join the Zoom call. Some of them are about to get their first substantial response to a complaint from Southern Housing in years.

As the connection issues resolve we see Paul, looking dead at the screen like a newsreader, speaking like it's a script. From 2022 to 2024, he says, their maintenance and repair budget has increased by £64million.

Microphone off, Maya on my left says that can't be enough – since 2022 the merger between Optivo and Southern Housing has happened, bringing about 44,000 new homes into the fold. And they weren't spending enough pre-merger either. Meanwhile Paul's going, "that's a 31% increase, we've never seen such a big increase."

'NEW' COMPLAINTS HANDLING

We get to tenants' questions. An orderly queue is formed for those who'll speak on the Zoom call, but the chat section is a flurry of con-

stant activity, stretching Director of External Relations Chris Middleton's ability to keep up. He tries to tell as many as he can – "Send your complaint to this new email address, don't worry, we will listen this time, this address is special".

While the tenants on the microphone give endless gut-wrenching accounts of longstanding problems, the executives sit pale-faced. Many issues are referred to Yvette Carter, Executive Director for Contract Services, responsible for repairs and maintenance. Very quickly she resorts to blanket apologies – she has no excuses to offer, real or make-believe. She can, however, promise that Sussex will now be treated as

East Sussex and West Sussex, each area with its own contract manager. And more people are being hired – the Sussex team has expanded from nine to 20 staff, plus there will be a new damp and mould team of about 15 staff.

It's hard for tenants (or anyone) to qualify these numbers. And it's hard for them to trust the head of the service that's been telling them the mould that killed two-year-old Ayaab Ishak in Rochdale, and recently hospitalised Obie Wilson in Hastings, is 'NOT a danger to health'.

RESIDENT CONSULTATION

The local Hastings office that used to deal with tenant complaints has recently been shut, with no apparent plans to reopen. Southern Housing will only talk to tenants by phone, email and – it seems – Zoom call. They're given no direct personal engagement, and meanwhile Yvette is telling them don't worry, the Sussex team is expanding. Jane Porter, Chief Operating Officer, is saying that the new East Sussex Anti-Social Behaviour and Lettings teams will have "more local knowledge".

The executives attempt a coup: 'Ah! We've made mistakes, yes, and we are sorry, but our new plans have been approved by the Sussex Regional Resident Panel, and our national Resident Governance Structure. So, you see, your concerns are being represented.'

None of the 50 tenants in the call have even heard of these panels, been invited to join them, or heard from a Hastings representative on any such panel. It looks very likely that there are no Hastings tenants in any part of the Resident Governance Structure, supposing those

structures even have a meaningful say on Southern Housing policy.

After the call ends, people seem just as frustrated as when it started. Another hoop had been jumped through, while nothing's done.

POSTSCRIPT:

At the start of this week the Facebook group Southern Housing Action was gathering signatories to an intended letter to Paul Hackett inviting him to attend a public meeting with tenants in Hastings. The letter points out that there is now no office for Southern Housing in Hastings, and that tenants are tired of having their phone calls, emails, and even letters from health professionals and political representatives, repeatedly ignored. They say they want to hear from him directly, and in person, that he be taking responsibility for changing how Southern Housing deals with damp and mould. The full text of the letter can be found at t.ly/bWsdV

In December 2022 the Southern Housing Group took over Optivo, at that point Hastings' largest provider of social housing. It's one of the largest housing associations in the UK with a portfolio of more than 78,000 homes.

On 17 May Southern Housing issued the following Media Statement headed Homes in Hastings:

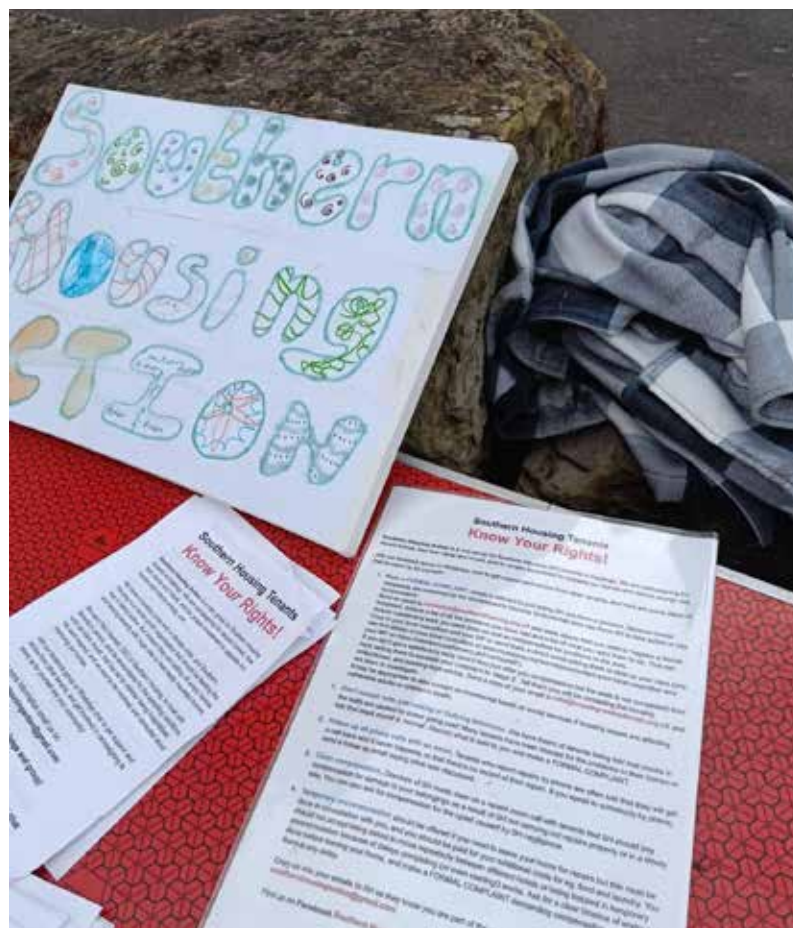
"We're committed to listening to our residents and ensuring they live in safe, comfortable and affordable homes. It's why our Executive Team held an open meeting with residents last month to hear their concerns and explain the action we've been taking.

"Our priority is investing in our existing homes, despite the challenges of the current economic climate. This year, we've approved the largest-ever budget increase for repairs and maintenance, a 31% increase from £204m to £268m. In the past five years, 87% of homes in Hastings have received home condition surveys and 397 of the 750 homes, which are rated below EPC C, have been retrofitted. In the next five years, around 2,000 homes will receive investment.

"We've formed a new dedicated damp and mould team who are focusing on permanent solutions and working closely with our Resident Scrutiny Panel.

"Of our 4,264 homes in Hastings, we currently have 14 homes in temporary accommodation. The Housing Ombudsman recommends moving residents into temporary accommodation if work in a resident's home is likely to be disruptive. Alternative options are explored first, with considerable compensation offered to residents if they're able to stay with family or friends.

"We would urge any resident who needs our support to contact us, so we can address any concerns."





Farewell to the Craft Box of Norman Road

HIP pays tribute to a local institution

The Craft Box of Norman Road closes its doors on May 21, and emotions are running high on Facebook.

"Nooooooo!" wails Jessie Banks. "Such a wonderful antidote to on-line shopping," writes Christian Clark. "They restarted my cross-stitch habit!" confides Councillor Adele Bates. "An actual useful shop, damn," bemoans Richard Heslop.

"An institution," says Mary Jane Baxter, while Andie Taliadoros is "Absolutely gutted".

"We didn't know we had that many fans," says Alan, hovering behind the till in his last week of trading. "It's interesting how we seem to have provided a community service. People like to come in and *feel* the textures, see the fab-

rics." They also like the prices. Alan and Sue did not get rich running this little shop. They did it, you might say, for love.

And they certainly didn't shout about it. The shop front was a dark grey, fluorescent fishing nets the only splash of colour. There was no shop signage. No splashy window displays (vertical blinds drawn at



4.30pm on the dot). No presence on social media. We don't even know their surnames because, as Sue told me firmly, "We're very private people". Yet for eleven years they have been at the beating heart of the St Leonards community.

There isn't much Alan and Sue don't know. "Someone once came in wanting frogs," says Alan, a Scouser who used to work for Jessops selling photographic equipment. Luckily, Sue was to hand: frogs, a type of jacket fastening, were swiftly sourced. Sue is a plain-speaking Yorkshirewoman, a former office manager and skilled seamstress. There is nothing she can't tell you about hindarm seams, darts or directional stitching.

"I've enjoyed explaining to people how to make their own bias binding," she says, smiling coyly. "I've fixed a few customers' sewing machines in my time." There's no article of clothing she can't make: Alan's trademark short-sleeved shirts are altered courtesy of Sue. Anything crafty gets her excited: cake decoration, jewellery making, rug tatting. She's been happy to pass her analogue passions on to a younger, digital generation. "I've enjoyed seeing lots of 11 and 12-year-old girls getting into crafting and making things themselves."

Sue feels strongly that social

media is to blame for many of the world's ills, and that the momentum of internet shopping is now irrevocable. "That was my motivation in setting this store up," she says. "It's a stand against internet shopping. Alan and I aren't box-shifters, we understand what we're selling, and we will do everything we can to help a customer get what they're looking for." "And if we haven't got it, we'll suggest a way to improvise," adds Alan. Sue gives him a hard stare. Alan shrinks back behind the till, eyes downcast but still twinkling.

Their double act has become part of Norman Road's DNA. Sue is a dragon – except she's actually a softie, especially if you start talking bias binding and Frister Rossmanns. Alan, five years her junior at 67, is firmly under her thumb. Or is he? "With retail, you need to be in control but make the customer think they're in control," he tells me.

The Craft Box remained open during Covid – a bright spot on a deserted street. Their justification was 'home and hardware' (essential hand tools), but it was the hand-crafting materials that stopped many households from going mad. Residents of all ages began sketching, sewing and beading like never before. "We saved people's sanity," says Sue.

And now they are closing. The lease is up at the end of May, the stock will be packed into boxes and sold in dribs and drabs at the odd market stall.

A last, nostalgic cruise around that tightly packed place reveals macrame cord, an 'Ultimate Bead Loom', bean bag refill plastic pellets, sequins (of course!), self-adhesive eyes, jam pot covers, bra strap extenders, wallpaper glue brushes and ostrich feathers. Whatever your most niche need, it was likely The Craft Box would have it.

Alan and Sue, you will be sorely missed.

Everybody Hurts?

HELEN MURPHY & NICK PELLING meet up with a wellbeing coach

Do you ever struggle with what might be called your psychological balance, to the extent that constant anxiety is driving you to consider desperate measures? I suspect we all know that kind of feeling. Indeed, there seems to be an epidemic of angst in this country right now. And what the NHS offers in this area is at best patchy and often non-existent. And yet out of this bleakness, some individuals are finding ways to turn their pain into something transformative for others.

We caught up with one such person - Lauren Magic - one of the new generation of what are often called

'wellbeing coaches'. She explained that this is someone who has been through difficult "lived experience" and therefore feels able to pass on some hard-won wisdom to other people. She clarified: "I am not a clinical therapist."

The key difference between clinical therapists and wellbeing coaches is that the latter share and use their own experience whereas clinical therapists insist on maintaining 'professional boundaries'. In talking to Lauren we soon realised she's not one to hide behind boundaries. "What I try to do is give people tools to be able to help and empower



themselves to heal – and to let them know, simply, that they're not alone." There is an extraordinary combination of sensitivity and tough-mindedness about Lauren, and that is probably why her practice is expanding rapidly.

But, what was it in her own experience that led her through such a difficult journey? From the age of about thirteen she suffered from endometriosis – a painful condition that is so physically debilitating that it's almost impossible to function normally. But as Lauren explained, it's not just that it's physically crippling, but that it eats away at your mental stability. She slowly discovered that the health service could do very little to help, either with the physical or the psychological torments of the condition. She had to research extensively to find her own way out of her maze of problems. Out of that has come deeply – and even bodily – ingrained knowledge. A knowledge that she now uses to help others.

In her work practice she employs many types of therapeutic approach, both on a one-to-one basis and in small group workshops or healing circles; she takes care to tailor her techniques to individuals.

She takes people through sessions on meditation, work on their inner child, issues around co-dependency and boundaries and a range of other ways of thinking about inner issues. "I want people to be able to sit with their own feelings and even forgive themselves."

Much of what she offers is accessed online, which is, in many ways, an ideal platform for socially fragile people. Interestingly, she says that many of the people who come to her are men, although women are equally responsive. It seems that Lauren's structured approach, with its emphasis on tools and skills, appeals strongly to all people searching for help, rather than being dumped on a waiting list.

In an age when many people in this town are not waving but drowning, it seems that Lauren is a possible lifeline out there.

For more information contact healingsoulsmagic@gmail.com

Festival for the Whole Town

The website for A Town Explores A Book (ATEAB) describes the festival as: “A reader-led festival of creative responses to a heritage book in St Leonards-on-Sea delivered by ExploreTheArch theatre company.” The emphasis is definitely on ‘responding’ to the books rather than enacting or evaluating them. Think complete community arts festival rather than a literary event.

Every spring, the festival explores key ideas from that year’s book – which have included weighty themes such as discrimination, isolation, adventure and imagination.

The festival was the brainchild of Gail Borrow and was launched in 2017, ‘exploring’ Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte. During the Spring holiday, a range of free activities was offered to local townspeople, and they were able to connect through the extended exploration of some of the words, themes and ideas in this iconic book.

In subsequent years, the chosen

books included some we may have loved and forgotten, or perhaps books that we think we know but haven’t actually read: *Great Expectations* (in 2018) *Robinson Crusoe* (2019), *The Time Machine* (2020), Edward Lear’s *Nonsense Songs* (2021). There have also been popular but less famous books such as *The Diddakoi* by Rumer Godden (2022) and *(The) Wonderful Adventure of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* by Mary Seacole (2023).

Some of the activities include readings from the books, writing competitions, stage and musical performances, exhibitions and creative workshops for adults and children – as well as activities in most of the local schools.

HOW HAS IT CHANGED AND GROWN?

Each year there are more events and activities in the streets of St Leonards and, in 2019, the festival was extended to 18 days. For example,

2018 saw the introduction of the outdoor art trail and, in 2021, themed shop windows became one of the key features. The street party offering free fête-style activities in Kings Road has also become a popular attraction.

HOW DOES IT BENEFIT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

The commitment to community engagement and dialogue is reflected in the involvement of local groups including Hastings and Bexhill Mencap’s Active Arts, Seaview Project and Zoom Arts. There is also a mentoring programme that funds early career artists to experience festival planning and delivery by working alongside the #ATownExploresABook artists. This scheme supports 16–28-year-olds overcoming barriers to work, such as learning challenges and health issues.

Perhaps most impressive is the evolution of the school engagement programme which facilitates the involvement of over 3,000 local children. Aware of the challenges that schools face with cuts in funding for creative activities and pressure to ‘catch up’ after the pandemic, the ATEAB team devised an ‘8 ways to connect’ programme, offering “a flexible format of eight creative,



at St Leonards Warrior Square Station: a collaboration of the ATEAB early career artist team with South-east Communities Rail Partnership.

The panels on the railings and brick arches on Platform 1 are an informative and artistic celebration of railway workers, including women, and the building of the local railway infrastructure – much of it by hand in poor conditions.

The closing ceremony of the festival was last Sunday and included a video address by actress Jenny Agutter, who played Roberta in the film version. The week before that, there was a packed award ceremony for young winners of the Creative Writing Competition, which included three prizes sponsored by HIP.

WHAT CAN WE LOOK FORWARD TO NEXT YEAR?

In 2025 ATEAB will be marking a bicentenary, not of a book, but writing related to a local scientific discovery.

For more information about ATEAB projects and events, and to find out about next year’s festival, go to their website atownexploresabook.com/

inviting, accessible offers that teachers could pick from and tailor to their schedules and constraints” to connect reading, writing and fun.

WHAT HAPPENED THIS YEAR?

This year, ATEAB explored E. Nesbitt’s *The Railway Children*. This included *The Platform Panel Project*

IT'S A

REVIVAL!



Inspiring Hastings

FRI 25TH MAY

HAUNTING HARMONIES & BLUEGRASS

VIBES WITH THE HACKLES

ON TOUR FROM THE USA!

SAT 31ST MAY

ONE MAN BAND BLUES EXPLOSION

BOB LOG III

YOU'VE NOT SEEN

ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE

FRI 14TH JUNE

KING SIZE SLIM

FROM THE M/V SEAWITCH

RETURNS WITH PABLO AND CREW

SCAN HERE



Britain is the most nature-depleted country in Europe and our natural environment in Hastings faces many threats, from sewage and plastic in rivers and the sea to habitats affected by climate change, and green spaces at risk from developers. Rising to these challenges are a host of community groups, a selection of which are profiled here. If you'd like to help any of these groups with their vital projects, please get in touch.

STANDING UP FOR NATURE IN HASTINGS & ROTHER

In March, an event held in Hastings called *Standing Up For Nature* attracted 80 people, demonstrating widespread public concern for our local environment. As a result, the Facebook group *Standing Up For Nature Hastings and Rother* has been set up, where everyone can share information and events. Plans are being made for future activities such as a workshop for green space campaigners and a *Standing Up For Nature Fair* with stalls and speakers.



To get involved and find out more about *Standing Up For Nature*, facebook.com/groups/955357386143087



On the Fire Hills Trail

FRIENDS OF HASTINGS COUNTRY PARK NATURE RESERVE

ANDREW COLQUHOUN
Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve is a unique 345ha area of maritime cliff with a top area of maritime acid grassland and heath, gill woodland (including some ancient woodland), scrub, neutral grassland, and amenity grassland. The site is significant both nationally and internationally for its biodiversity and geology and has therefore been granted Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) status. The 270 Friends of Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve pay a small subscription to help us protect, promote and enhance the natural environment of the Reserve, so that its value, wildlife and flora are protected for future generations.



New members can join via our website: fhcpnr.org see our membership leaflet available in the Bale House

CHURCH WOOD COMMUNITY ORCHARD

MARY DAWSON
Church Wood Community Orchard is in the beautiful Church Wood Local Nature Reserve in Hollington. Twelve apple trees were planted in 2021. The orchard is run by a volunteer group who are looking after the trees, developing a local species wildflower meadow and creating a space for wildlife. Members also support other 'green' groups and the local school. The aim is to create a space for growing fruit to share, to encourage others to enjoy the Nature Reserve, and to educate and have fun in our community. We are planning an event on 7 July, Midsummer Meadow Day at the orchard, and a visit to Marline meadow, as well as a craft and music event in the autumn.



We welcome volunteers and visitors and to do so, please contact churchwood.co@mail.com

SAVE OLD ROAR GILL

VALERIE MYERS
We want to promote the restoration of Old Roar Gill as a nature reserve and much-loved tourist attraction. Old Roar Gill's geology is fascinating, and it is home to a huge variety of different plants, mosses and liverworts, fungi, insects and invertebrates, some of which are very rare. We want it to be a safe and nurturing environment for wildlife as well as a safe and relaxing environment for people to enjoy. Our aim is to work together with residents and Hastings Borough Council to do this and we have submitted plans to HBC for consideration. We've continued to campaign for clean water in the Gill, where the water has been tainted by sewage leaks and other pollution, but protecting the whole of the Gill is most important to us.



You can view our page and join us in our Facebook group: facebook.com/groups/810562710561904



Old Roar Gill's romantic Falls

ALEXANDRA PARK GREENHOUSE

LINDA PEARSON
Alexandra Park Greenhouse Group (CN 1177523) was established in 2018. The mission of the trustees was to restore the only surviving greenhouse in Alexandra Park depot which fell into dereliction in the 1980s. Now the Greenhouse is back to its former glory due to generous community funding and dedicated volunteer support; it is a charity shop for plants. Open twice weekly for plant sales and plant donations, a monthly programme of gardening sessions, talks and workshops is planned.

Volunteers are welcomed to join gardening sessions and to discuss ideas for the development of this special building in the wonderful Alexandra Park.



Volunteers are welcomed to join gardening sessions and to discuss ideas for the development of this special building in the wonderful Alexandra Park. See our website: our-greenhouse.org

FRIENDS OF COMBE VALLEY

WILLIAM ACKROYD
and the FCV COMMITTEE
Friends of Combe Valley was established in 2015 to help protect and improve the Combe Valley Countryside Park for the benefit of the environment and people. Now well-established with a group of volunteers, it works with the Combe Valley



The Greenhouse at its best



Standing Up For Nature

Organised by DAVID EP DENNIS and introduced by CHARMIAN KENNER, Features and Environment join forces to highlight wildlife and environmentalist groups in the area



The beautiful Peacock butterfly (Aglais io)

Countryside Park CIC, which manages the park, and their agents Groundwork South. The park covers about 1,480 acres including the local beach and from Glyne Gap extends inland bounded by Pebsham, Sidley, Crowhurst, Hollington and West St Leonards, with Filsham Reed Bed and an SSSI along Combe Haven. Regular work includes clearing paths, litter picks, and dealing with dead and fallen trees.



For more information on Friends of Combe Valley visit their website friendsofcombevalley.co.uk or email team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk

HASTINGS & EAST SUSSEX NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
ERIC CAWTHRAW, DARRYL JOHNSON and SUE MILES
The Society was founded locally in 1893 and we've recently celebrated our 130th anniversary. In recent years, the Society has taken a friendly approach to attract people who want to enjoy our beautiful countryside and improve their natural history knowledge. To this end, the Society runs a Thursday weekly walks programme and arranges periodic evening talks informing both members and guests about many aspects of the natural world.
The Society also produces an annual Journal called *The Hastings*



Satisfying woodland work

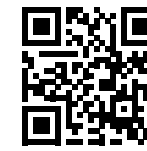
& *East Sussex Naturalist* containing sightings, statistics and articles. Copies go to several prestigious universities in the UK and Irish Republic.



To join the Hastings & East Sussex Natural History Society, visit their website hastings-naturalhistory.org or look for the Hastings & East Sussex Natural History Society Facebook group

STRANDLINERS
ANDY DINSDALE

Strandliners' aim is to reduce toxic waste from our waterways and coastline for the benefit of people and wildlife. We survey for plastic pollution, identifying and recording the data as evidence to lobby for change, from the River Cuckmere to Dungeness along the coast and upstream. Our main concern is the adverse effects of man-made pollution on humans and wildlife, not only plastic (throughout its lifecycle from extraction to disposal) but also sewage and agricultural/stormwater run-off.
We strive for change through community engagement, delivering training and events, developing citizen science and increasing knowledge about plastic waste, wildlife and water quality.



For more information or to get involved, please visit Strandliners' website strandliners.org

HASTINGS CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS
OWEN JOHNSON
Hastings Conservation Volunteers have organised practical conservation tasks on Sundays, working almost continually since 1987 wherever we are most needed. Everyone over 18 is welcome, and we provide tools, gloves, insurance and training. Nature sites, which the volunteers currently have in their care include Sussex Wildlife Trust's reserves at Marline Valley (St Leonards) and Flatropers Wood (Beckley), and the Powdermill Trust's reserves at Wainwright Close (St Leonards), Powdermill Wood (Battle) and Hooe Common. We believe passionately that prac-

tical action is the best way to reunite people with the natural world.



To get involved please contact OwenJohnson-Trees@gmail.com or visit simon45162.wixsite.com/hastingsconservation

THE POWDERMILL TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION
OWEN JOHNSON

The Powdermill Trust (registered charity 1121510) was established in 1980 to protect at-risk sites of nature conservation in East Sussex. With several expert ecologists as Trustees, we currently own, rent, and manage nature reserves at Wainwright Close (St Leonards), Powdermill Wood (Battle), Hooe Common and Rotherfield. These places include the best example of a tussock sedge swamp in East Sussex at Powdermill Wood, the best raised bog at Hooe Common, plus ancient woodland and unimproved pasture at Rotherfield – places full of rare species which would die out locally without our careful management.

For £10 a year, members gain access to our reserve at Rotherfield and receive a full-colour newsletter. Contact Jill Hart at 01892 852137 and c/o OwenJohnson-Trees@gmail.com or visit their website powdermilltrust.co.uk

FRIENDS OF SUMMERFIELD WOODS
SARAH WARD

A remnant of the old Bohemia estate, Summerfield Woods is a rich deciduous woodland with a ghyll (gill) stream running through it. The ancient watercourse has cut a steep sided valley through the woods, the banks of which are now covered in huge ferns and shade-loving plants. The woods are beautiful at all times of year and are currently covered in a carpet of bluebells. They are also home to many species of birds, butterflies, insects, plants, mammals and veteran trees, making them a unique biodiversity hotspot, just five minutes from Hastings train station.

Summerfields Woods belongs to HBC and is looked after by a volunteer group that meets once a month.



Summerfields Woods belongs to HBC and is looked after by a volunteer group that meets once a month. Join via Friends of Summerfields Woods Facebook Group.

TCV THE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS, HASTINGS
LORNA NEVILLE
The Conservation Volunteers is a national conservation charity and this year, we are marking 65 years of connecting people and green spaces across the country. Our local

branch is in Hastings where we coordinate conservation activities on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays to benefit people's health and wellbeing and improve green spaces for nature and biodiversity in East Sussex.

All our sessions are free to join, and they will be at various locations, from woodlands to wetlands, nature reserves to hospitals. We also run the East Sussex Health Walks scheme with four walks every week in Hastings. Find us on Facebook for lots of local wildflower walks this Spring.



For conservation contact Carrie. edmonds@tcv.org.uk 07764 655609 or see tinyurl.com/TCVSussex. For Health Walks contact Lorna. lorna.neville@tcv.org.uk 07740899559 or see tinyurl.com/EastSussexHealthWalks



Testing river water quality

BEXHILL WILD CIC
by DAVID EP DENNIS
Bexhill Wild CIC is a project-based registered community interest company working to conserve wildlife and landscape in the coastal area between Rye Harbour and Pevensey Marshes. It uses the grants it receives to help other organisations who are working to save wildlife.

- Bexhill Wild CIC projects include:
- urging local and national-level protection for Galley Hill's rare wildlife and special beach landscape
 - increasing anti-drought measures for wildlife in woodlands
 - electronic bird recordings of all public woods inside Bexhill's nine wards using PUC AI
 - conservation and enhancement work in Sidley Woods and the streambed of the Egerton Park stream
 - provision of hedging plants and seeds
 - the provision of trained ward wardens for Bexhill
 - slide presentations about all aspects of nature including wildlife food chains and seashore inter-tidal life



You can contact our Managing Director David EP Dennis if you are interested in a presentation - by emailing: bexhillwild-CIC@outlook.com



PHOTOS: KENT BARKER

the At Risk Register, but since then little appears to have happened.

VACANCY AND DILAPIDATION

I think the White Rock Hotel with its excellent track record might be persuaded to return to take charge of the catering unit which flanks the entrance to St Mary, but how could one resolve all the other problems of vacancy and dilapidation at the Arcade? This would be one visible sign to visitors that Hastings is open for business and regeneration is taking effect.

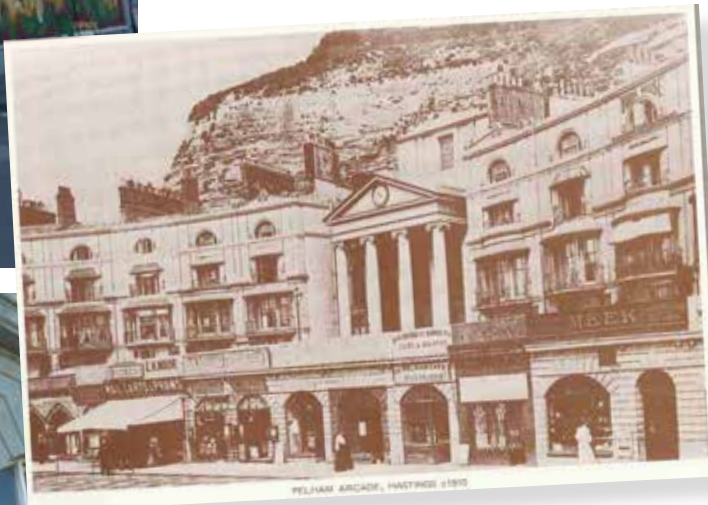
Conversely the present sorry state of affairs - in front of what should be Hastings' crowning architectural glory - prolongs the stigma of Hastings as a 'ne'er do well' town. We reinforce failure when East Sussex is such an area

enterprises depend on the hospitality business. These were false economies. Our town will not get the planned 250,000 growth in visitors for the Castle without being far more proactive in its marketing.

Other 'blue sky' ideas might include a new box office and computer ticketing system, embedded in the Tourist Information Office. A joint marketing initiative to showcase the huge musical talent available in our town and grow through cooperation and greater professionalism. Ideally it would be compatible with the White Rock Theatre ticketing system. Booking fees could be applied towards cultural regeneration expenses.

RESTORE SELF-RESPECT

A merchandising shop should fill the available vacant space until suitable quality commercial tenants are found to pay rent at Pelham Arcade. The diverse selection of 'Theart' T-shirts and Fleeces seen around town might do something to restore self-respect in our tourist offering and more awareness of the reasons why visitors should come back for more, whether it be music, chess, mini-golf, skateboarding or the Castle.



Castles in the Air

CHRISTOPHER CORMACK says that the continued closure of St Mary in the Castle is a disaster for Hastings, and that the boarded-up Pelham Arcade in front is a disgrace. What is needed, he argues, is some radical blue-sky thinking.



As an Old Towner who often walks past St Mary in the Castle, the sorry sight of its closure and all-but-derelict Pelham shopping arcade brings a constant reminder of our council's failure to build on the success of the many memorable events that took place there. When all the Morris dancers collected in the town to celebrate 'Jack in the Green' with us, where else could be better to share their interest in folk and dancing? What other venue in Hastings provides the flexibility to stage innovative opera?

It was a huge disappointment that no provision was made for this once flourishing arts centre from the Levelling-up Funds. More than £5 million will be allocated towards making Hastings Castle a 'Flagship Signature Project' but nothing for St Mary - very soon Hastings Borough Council (HBC) might be having to manage two ruins: one at the top and one at the bottom of the cliff.

So what can be done for St Mary? One solution might be to apply part

of the Pelham Place Car Park's income towards running costs. After all, visitors to St Mary ITC pay between £4.80 and £6.40 for parking. Without the events taking place, this income is lost, and parking bays stand empty. A successful event used to generate 600+ visitors. If only 150 came by car, just two or three events a week would generate about £75,000 a year. The Foreshore Trust, as the owner of the car park land, used to benefit from this income.

INCOME GENERATOR

Another way of looking at this, is that each successful event at St Mary might generate £1,100 for Foreshore Trust. Events generally take place in the evening when most day-trippers will already have driven home. So it is in the Foreshore Trust's financial interest to perhaps pay £1000 for an event to go ahead. It would still benefit from the remaining £100 that it would not otherwise have. A classic win win.

The Foreshore Trust (FT) is a charity wholly run by the council which is its sole trustee. The most recent accounts for the Trust on the Charity Commission's website are for 2020. These show gross annual income in the region of £1.4m, of which parking income is about £1.1m. So if the Trust were to offer St Mary ITC an annual subsidy of £75,000 for core funding, this would represent about 5% of its gross revenue and would be largely financed by additional parking revenue at Pelham Place. It would also provide some longer-term reassurance and stability to St Mary's finances.

In order to relaunch the arts centre successfully, it is essential to complete the refurbishment and reletting of all the vacant commercial retail units at Pelham Arcade in front of St Mary. These are in multiple ownership - including the council - and are listed Grade II*. Renovation financed by Historic England and HBC was 'completed' in 2021, thus removing them from

of outstanding beauty and general wealth. We are confirming anti-Hastings prejudice that holds back important investors and visitors to the town. Its location near the Old Town, the mini-golf and the fisherman's beach, makes it all the more important to regenerate this eyesore where so many day-trippers can see it.

Whatever happened to Jeremy Birch's 'Grotbuster' campaign? Perhaps the council could force owners and tenants (including itself!) to complete refurbishment? It would certainly seem possible that they could levy the Uniform Business Rate on vacant units where this is proper and feasible. The council must have extensive experience in dealing with the 'carrot and stick' solution to this sort of problem! The stick is as important as the carrot to get things done. I would urge that landlords are forced to offer a rent free-period for as long as the period they had allowed dilapidation to accumulate!

CULTURAL REGENERATION

But I'd also urge the council to exert pressure to ensure that all vacant units at the Arcade are reopened immediately. If they are not, perhaps the council itself could rent them for a Tourist Information Office. It really is shameful that Hastings has cut back so much on its tourism marketing when so many

The history of St Mary in the Castle, especially the first collegiate church, is interwoven with Hastings Castle - the canons claimed that their church was endowed by Edward the Confessor before 1066. Examination of the old St Mary ruin suggests the stone church building predates the rest of the castle and could well have been built before 1070. When the 1066 story is developed for promoting Hastings Castle as a visitor destination, I hope it will be seen as worthwhile and right that some - even a small - portion, of the £5 million+ budgeted for the project can be allocated towards the St Mary's part of Hastings' heritage and the promotion of cultural tourism generally.



From Commedia to Tragedy

VICTORIA KINGHAM talks to Jenny Miller about Barefoot Opera's new project, *La Traviata*

Jenny Miller is taking Barefoot Opera from strength to strength. She is also taking it from comedy to tragedy. Last year's production of *La Cenerentola* was a small triumph of minimalist, but brilliant, opera – a modern, relevant production of Rossini's commedia dell'arte re-telling of the Cinderella fairy tale. Auditions have taken place in London, but the rehearsals take place here in St Leonards in Jenny Miller's almost-fairy-tale house, in a stately room that runs from the front to the back. It's a wonderful facility, and she is clearly a gifted producer.



→↑ **Outrageous at the gaming table attrib. Carl d'Unker**
→ **Soprano Beren Kader Fidan**
↑ **Tenor Tylor Lamani**

tigious opera training organisation in the UK, and where Miller herself trained as an opera singer, after being educated in France] and a tenor from Cape Town. He's a lovely singer, and it gives him an opportunity to spread his wings because Cape Town has only one opera company. Then we have all the chorus work by a quartet of terrific soloists, a kind of 'violin quartet' of soloists working intricately."

Verdi's theme is as relevant now as it was when he wrote the opera. He wanted a contemporary setting when he wrote it, but was not allowed it. "The only reason why Verdi would need to put his characters in the past would be because of censorship. There was very strict censorship. *Rigoletto* was a scathing political commentary, and he was not allowed to set it in the present day. And for *Traviata* he wanted the hypocritical, two-faced bourgeoisie who surrounded him to be confronted with their cruelty and their disregard for human dignity and truth."

MISOGYNY THEN AND NOW Violetta, the heroine, is a courtesan, a high-class prostitute, who, though sought-after by men, is essentially abused and has little choice about how she lives. Verdi "wants to keep us focussed on her trying to lead a free life, a good life. He always keeps the human characters alive; no one is a stereotype", continues Miller. This new production will hone in on the misogyny theme: anyone who might have read Laura Bates' *Everyday Sexism* will be conscious (if they weren't already) of how much of this is still factored into the way we communicate and



the assumptions behind our actions, both in private and in public. As a courtesan, Violetta led what could on the surface be called a life of luxury, but was completely under the control of men. There's a telling mid-19th century German painting of the party in Scene I, in which Violetta stands Outrageous at the Gaming Table handling coins, entirely surrounded by men except for Annina, her maid.

NEW DIRECTION

There is a new director for this performance. Miller says she has 'stepped back' to allow last year's assistant director, Michael Spenceley, to become this year's director, and a new, younger member of the company, Alfie Chesney, assistant director. Miller acts as producer and adviser, "steering the ship, or whatever", she explains, though I dare say her idea of stepping back is to do more work than ever, just in a slightly different capacity. The musicians in the band are as they were last year, with the exception that the clarinet player, Andrew Sparling, who both played and sang in last year's production, will this year concentrate on the instrumental alone, and the accordion players. The music will be arranged as usu-

ally by the music director, the exceptional Laurence Panter.

While the Barefoot company have again, deservedly, gained Arts Council funding this year, this is a compact and minimal production in the Barefoot tradition, born in the first place out of necessity. In Jenny Miller's music room are some of the Opera props, which are used differently year after year and act as signifiers rather than static scene-content. It has to be stressed though that this is an absolutely professional company and production. The singers, though mainly young and recently graduated, are from very high-achieving music schools. The director, Michael Spenceley, trained at Ballet Rambert and has vast experience of stage direction, including as part of the Olympics team in 2012. Laurence Panter gained a choral scholarship at Cambridge, later graduating from Trinity Laban. The whole band have solid musical credentials. The production, as last year, begins here in St Leonards in St John's Church, but has tour dates arranged throughout London and the South East. As always, local singers are incorporated into certain scenes – the traditional Brindisi (drinking song) in the first act will feature local choirs from each venue.

La Traviata is a more ambitious project than last year's: the opera contains some of the most challenging passages for singers, particularly for the tenor, who notoriously needs to produce a high C, and the soprano who, towards the end of the lovely aria where she wishes to be *sempre libre* – ironic, given later developments in the story – traditionally produces a high E-flat, though I understand this is not in the original score. In spite of its popularity, only the very best can perform this opera, and Miller and the rest of the creative team will have unerringly chosen the very best. I can't wait to see it.

ESSENTIALLY INTERNATIONAL

So the universal 'poor man's band' takes on a new symbolism within this essentially international production. The original novel is French, the opera adaptation Italian, the singers (all newly-auditioned, since last year's singers' careers are now flourishing), from everywhere. Asked about the cast, Miller says: "There are seven soloists working as an ensemble. We have a Turkish soprano from the National Opera Studio [known to be the most pres-

TOUR DATES AND VENUES

- **21 June:** St. John the Evangelist, St Leonards-on-sea (featuring Voiceworks choir and Bexhill College)
- **22 June:** Crowhurst Place, Lingfield (outdoor performance featuring East Grinstead Choral Society and Imberhorne School)
- **29 June:** Rye Creative Centre (featuring the Marsh Choir)
- **19 July:** Findon Place, West Sussex (outdoor performance)
- **14 September:** Down House, Tunbridge Wells (with Tunbridge Wells Choral Society)
- **17 September:** Maidenhead Music Society
- **21 September:** St. Michael and All Angels, Brighton (with Brighton and Hove 6th Form College and choir TBC)
- **24-28 September:** Grimeborn Festival, Arcola Theatre, Dalston (with Hackney Voices)
- **5 October:** Wooburn Festival, Maidenhead

Fighting Back the Years

NICK PELLING explores a brilliant new photographic project

The world of boxing seems contradictory: brutish yet alive with the metaphorical possibilities of all human struggle. For this reason, perhaps, it has always attracted writers and artists – think Mailer’s *The Fight* or Scorsese’s *Raging Bull*. Some might say that this poetic aspect is all very odd, given that at a basic level, it is about two human animals each trying to beat the other into submission. The renowned photographer and Hastings resident, John Cole, wants to bring us his unique take on this paradoxical realm.

STRANGELY BEAUTIFUL

Cole is in the process of producing a book of photographs, *Shadow Boxers*, from his time in and around the New York club boxing scene in the 1970s. It is a world that no longer exists: a grimy, muscular world of contenders and bloodied nearly men; a strangely beautiful theatre of desperate people fighting opponents both real and psychological.

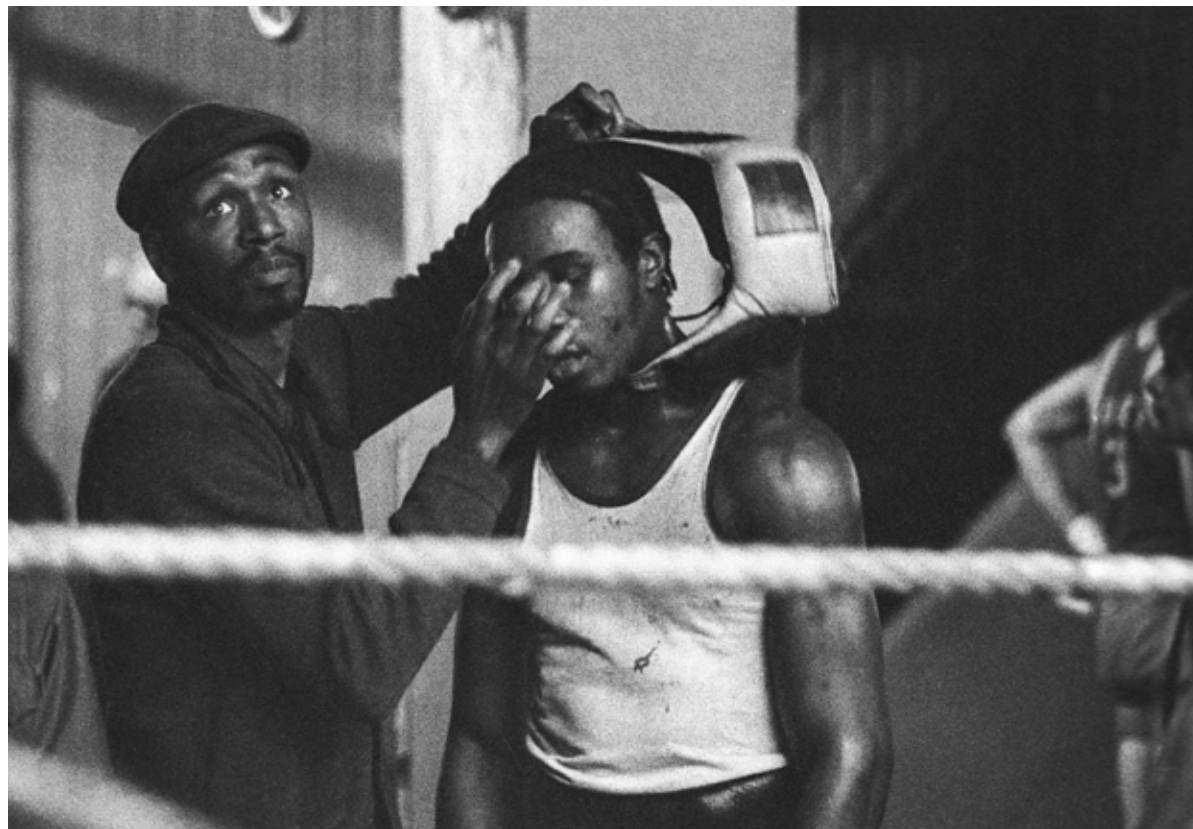
John explained that he went to New York in 1975 to take up a posi-

tion as a writer on *Newsweek* but, as a lover of photography, had been inexorably drawn to local boxing clubs, such as Gleason’s in midtown Manhattan. “It was like entering a black and white movie, a world of real Rockys.” After his immersion in that *milieu*, he admits that he became “a boxing obsessive” and felt impelled to record it all in that most direct and emotionally intravenous art form that is black and white photography.

John is seeking to raise funds for this project via a Kickstarter campaign. This is not easy. High quality black and white photography in a beautifully designed book is an extremely expensive business.

FIGHTING FOR FIGHTERS

His motivation is not just about the photography itself. He is hoping to donate a portion of the profits to two appropriate causes. First, to the Ringside Charitable Trust, a body that looks after ex-fighters. John points out that there is almost nothing to support old fighters, many of



Gleason’s Gym

whom suffer physically from the toll of boxing. But he also wants to give funds to the local West Hill Boxing Club: “boxing gives young people confidence and a way of controlling their emotional aggression.”

There is, of course, quite a debate today about so-called ‘toxic masculinity’ and it is tempting to argue that boxing is one of the ways that testosterone can be channelled. But this

is simplistic. It misses the point that women’s boxing is one of the fastest-growing sports in Britain. The truth is, as John argues, boxing is good for all young people because it develops in them two vital qualities: self-confidence and self-discipline.

THE FIFTEENTH ROUND

Like all artists, John is also motivated by a desire to put his creative

work out there. As he puts it, rather beautifully, “It is very important to me to see this body of work published before I reach my fifteenth round.” If you would like to help John see this work come to life, please go to the Kickstarter address below to make a pledge.

[Kickstarter.com/projects/shadow-boxers/shadow-boxers](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/shadow-boxers/shadow-boxers)

Arts and social hub opens at Stella Dore

MERLIN BETTS

Some of you will have wandered into St Andrews Mews of an evening only to stumble across a bustling night of art, performance and music, dripping with delectable cocktails and buzzing personalities – if so, you’ve been to Mo’s Lounge.

The last time I went was in the cold of winter, a warm fire burning in a metal pit at the centre of the Mews, music in the air. I saw ghosts at the gallery upstairs, chanced upon a fellow anarchist as we lurked among fishy plastic testaments to autocannibalistic excretion ... and did I have a personalised cocktail mixed by Mo himself? Who knows? – the right cocktail is probably one you shouldn’t remember. And anyway, the Lounge’s time at St Andrews Mews has come to an end.

HIP last covered the eponymous Mo El-Kadey just after he’d moved to Hastings (*Renewed Talent and Life Expressed*, August, 2020). I say HIP, it was me, but I wrote a bit differently back then. The impression I had of him was this: “Mo has a relentless energy and drive to achieve. His works are remarkable for their honesty: even if swirled through vibrant colours and geometric abstraction, the scenes depicted are true to life and true expressions of Mo’s experiences and worldview.”

That same relentless energy and colourful mix of influences has created an enticing celebration of Hastings culture in Mo’s Lounge, spotlighting local artists, comedians, poets, beers and wines. Mo says: “Its purpose is to be an artist hub providing creatives in St Leonards and Hastings with a platform to get their voices heard, and for patrons to immerse themselves in this creative



Mo El-Kadey, organiser

space whilst enjoying their choice of beverage.”

At Easter, Mo’s Lounge had to migrate from St Andrews Mews, and now hopes to re-establish itself in

Stella Dore, St Leonards. The move has not been without expense however, so Mo’s set up a GoFundMe for anyone who wants to support his hub and get it running again in St

Leonards: [gofundme.com/f/help-mos-lounge-back](https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-mos-lounge-back).

Mo’s Lounge will be hosting a fundraiser and reopening at Stella Dore on 23-24 May (that’s probably tonight and tomorrow if you’re reading this on the day it’s out). Every £1 you donate to the cause gets you £1.05 behind the bar – so go ahead and drink down your own generosity. It’ll be Brewing Brothers beers, Sussex wines and signature cocktails, and as to the entertainments

On the Thursday, it’s a comedy and poetry night hosted by Tara Valentine, featuring drag and comedy from Nik Pope (aka Persephone), and poetry from Hastings Book Festival slam winner, Yellow and Green. That’ll be followed by an art auction featuring five local artists. All this plus drinks, music and social runs from 5.30-11.00pm, with happy hour on cocktails from 5.30-7.30pm.

On the Friday, it’s a little more relaxed with an art workshop from 6.30 to 8.30pm followed by drinks and a DJ until 11.00. If Mo’s fundraiser is successful, the Lounge can only expand, with the potential to host bigger performance and party nights at venues around town.

LEE LONDON



Peter and Kerry at The Stade

CLARE PARK



Deirdre Keneally - Every Brilliant Thing

Stables Monthly

STUART BAILLIE

It's fair to say that the last few weeks have demonstrated what a significant range The Stables provides. There's been everything from a well-supported craft fayre to a ten-night run of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, a play about Oswald Mosley, a one-man show about Robert Kennedy and 'the funniest play you'll ever see about

depression', *Every Brilliant Thing*. The craft fayre demonstrated just how deeply embedded The Stables is in the heart of the community. More than a dozen stalls, selling everything from homemade marmalade to knitwear, arts, crafts, and gifts were busy all morning. Then the run of *The Cherry Orchard* demonstrated the excellence of The Stables in delivering strong performances in difficult but iconic plays. In *Every Brilliant Thing*, director Helen Black intro-

duced a bit of audience participation, a first for the theatre, adding a new dimension that was great fun to be part of. As we go to press, Ross Drury's *Game Plan* will be opening. It's a play by Alan Ayckbourn, his usual mix of tough themes with a good dollop of humour.

The pioneering exchange programme with the Chicago Heights Drama Group comes to fruition at the end of June. This year it's the turn of the Chicago group to come to Hastings. During their visit they will be performing *The Miss Firecracker Contest* by Beth Henley. This is part of what some believe might be the only theatre exchange programme of its kind in the world. The first exchange between the two groups happened in 1999, and has been a fixture ever since. Mary Ellen Fawk, from the Chicago Heights group, says many great friendships have been forged over the years and that the exchange is a fantastic opportunity: "There is a mystique about, and respect for, British actors, and coming over here to see how a piece of British theatre gets put together, to see the work ethic, is wonderful. The whole exchange programme is just a great shared opportunity," she says. When a team from The Stables crossed the Atlantic last year they took Ray Cooney's *Run For Your Wife* to perform to Chicago audiences.

Tickets for the show are selling fast so contact the box office on 01424 423221 or book online at stables-theatre.co.uk. If you'd like to be part of The Stables team drop in and see us sometime and find out more.

Folk By the Sea

HARRY HAWKINS

A banner depicting a fabric sun shining above a denim sky adorned the Stade Hall. This was the main signpost for the Queer Ass Folk event, set up by Hayley aka Tygermylk. The event is focused on giving queer musicians a space to perform which pays them fairly, with a portion of proceeds from this event also going towards Trans Pride Hastings. There was a gentle ambience once the music began, despite all the seats in the Stade Hall being filled.

Peter and Kerry, a duo who have worked in a variety of musical guises, including synths and soundtracking, kicked off the proceedings. They were in fact completely at home here. You could hear alchemy in the way their voices and weaving, stitching guitars blended, the fruit of many years working together.

Tygermylk was next. With a suitably rustic steel strung acoustic, enchanting images were built, particularly in their song *I Killed The Bees*, whose soaring, dreamlike

chorus juxtaposed apocalyptic images. They also performed a terrific, peeled-back rendition of the classic rock staple *Baba O'Riley*.

Eden J Powells was third billing, also impressively stripping back their songs (usually played as a full band). The circular and meditative patterns of their numbers brought to mind cult folk and emo artists like Elliot Smith. Some recent songs of Eden's were inspired by the conflicting feelings evoked by a return to their hometown.

Charlie Austen is a musician who puts incredible detail into her craft. Her songs were buoyed by a remarkable percussion set and she managed a gamut of styles - introductory tune Chemistry brought a Bill Withers-like snap of guitar. However, instruments and facility alone aren't what sealed the deal on Charlie's music, but the authentic portraits she painted and the infectious energy she brought to it.

The next Queer Ass Folk show will take place at the Stade Hall on 5 July. Details will be announced via [instagram - @queerassfolkmusic](https://www.instagram.com/queerassfolkmusic)



DROP IN

MEET THE TEAM
TELL US YOUR STORY
DISCUSS IMPORTANT
HASTINGS EVENTS

30 MAY 5:30PM
BULLET CAFE & COFFEE SHOP
38 ROBERTSON STREET TN34 1HT

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BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

Manifesto: The Battle for Green Britain

By Dale Vince
Independently Penguin, rrp £10.99
REVIEW BY RICHARD PRICE

Are you dispirited because of the climate and biodiversity emergency, and the fact that the urgency of these issues is ignored by the main political parties? If so, you can take comfort from Vince's book: at least people are thinking of the policy options that are available and trying to communicate with them. The book is in a revised and updated edition, and is split between memoir, a description of how he built his business, and policy solutions that if implemented by governments might save humans from catastrophe. The author's aspiration is for a new Green industrial revolution.

However, things haven't really been going to plan. The government wants to allow exploration for oil and gas in areas of the ocean set aside for wind turbines. Labour have rolled back their green pledges, giving the awful state of the economy as their excuse. Both parties are committed to economic growth although it clearly is unsustainable and is the cause of both the climate and ecological emergencies.

The current trajectory of our climate is towards an irreversible vast catastrophe that may endanger the viability of humanity. There are people who do not believe this. They believe that we are experiencing a natural phenomenon, part of the natural cycle, an ice age. The important point to remember is that these are people who do not work in the field of climate-change science and therefore do not know what they are taking about.

ETHICAL AND HUMANE BUSINESS

My main concern with the book was based on something degrowth researcher Jason Hickel said in a Planet Critical interview. He said the concept behind green growth is problematic. Green growth is used as an excuse by the main political parties to carry on with growth-based capitalism. Whereas, what is needed is to quickly reduce carbon emissions by scaling down some sectors of the economy and moving towards consuming less energy. Vince seems aware of this problem, writing, "Capitalism got us into this mess. The rampant burning of fossil fuels that has created the current crisis has been driven more than anything else by the current version of capitalism." Vince clearly cares about justice and equality, believing ethics are core to fixing the mess that we are in.

What comes across most strongly is the author's positive attitude and optimism. Vince relates how he once decided to create a windmill turbine that could sell energy on to others, and how he approached a bank for funding and succeeded in becoming a successful provider of wind power. The author helped Forest Row FC to become the first vegan football club, replacing cheap one-pound burgers with high quality vegan food. They also kept managers on rather than regularly firing and hiring them which is the norm. He made a great success of

the club. It is impressive the ethical and humane way that the author behaves in business.

Conversely, the book also describes some terrible corporate behaviour. Despicable lying, cheating

was there with his eighteen-month-old son, as he describes in a chapter titled *Enemy of the State*. The cause of the 100-vehicle convoy was an eviction. An anti-war/anti-nukes collective – CND supporters, travelers and others – occupied

Molesworth, a disused RAF base earmarked for American nuclear weapons. Those moved on from the site sought an alternative pitch and headed for Stonehenge, chased by the police. They were forced from the road so as to circumvent a police blockade on the motorway. The police proceeded to pull men and women (some with children and babies) from their vehicles and beat many up. The event is the subject of a protest song by The Levellers.

The last two chapters are filled with common-sense policies that any government could adopt. The main idea of the book is centred on the fact that the majority of our personal carbon footprint (80%) comes from just three areas of life, energy, transport and food. The practical advice in the book describes how to reduce this footprint. His manifesto is full of the type of policy changes which, if actioned, would give us all hope of a future.

He writes that, "electricity is straightforward, we can make all of the electricity we need using the wind, the sun and the sea. We already have over 30% of our electricity made this way, we just need to close the gap to 100%" and he describes how to do it. "Gas looks like the hardest problem to solve" but "we don't need to stop using gas for heating; we can use

green gas". The disgusting way that the government subsidises fossil fuel companies instead of renewable energy companies is discussed. The airline industry also comes under attack: just 1% of Britons take 20% of all UK flights and 10% take over 50%. The water industry spills large amounts of sewage into our sea and needs to be in the public sector along with the other utilities. Hastings, of course, has experience of a private water company, Southern Water – floods, a period without water, and pollution.

THE BENEFITS FOR ALL OF US ARE INCREDIBLE

The case is often made that higher taxes are a disincentive to businesses and reduce their ability to bear overheads or grow. Vince does not agree, pointing out that business tax was 26% not many years ago and slashing it did not unleash a wave of growth. It resulted in greater corporate and investor profits. He writes about reforming the tax system so that "it becomes a virtuous circle" and the need to get away "from the fossil fuel economy underpinned by capitalism of the money *über alles* kind". We cannot do this until the rules of the game change, he writes, "taxes, subsidies and regulations are the keys".

In the epilogue he writes, "I am filled with hope. We have an opposition party that gets it, with ambitious policies that make sense – a major shift in public attitude – and if there was an election tomorrow, they would win by a landslide. I am hoping to help our new government deliver a Green Britain. The benefits for all of us are incredible. Not least for future generations".

Manifesto: The Battle for Green Britain is available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road, Hastings TN34 1RE



deceptions and espionage. Thames Water treated his company very badly. Elon Musk is mentioned as being a liar, Tesla seems more of an attempt to save the car industry than save the climate.

FLOODS, A PERIOD WITHOUT WATER, AND POLLUTION

It is governments too: prior to Vince's book I was unaware of the connection between news footage I had seen in the 1980s showing police chasing a convoy of travellers up the M4, and Margaret Thatcher's authoritarian government. I had been about to join the police cadets but changed my mind when I saw how they treated the miners, but I knew nothing of The Battle of the Beanfield. Vince

CROSSWORD CORNER

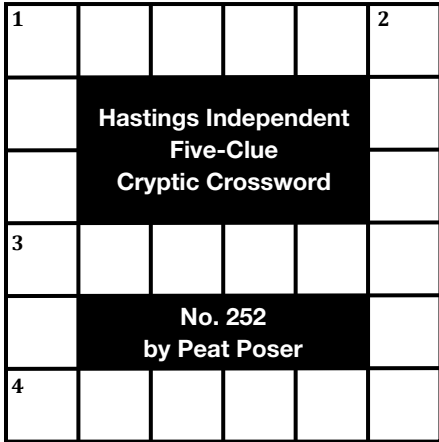
Across

- Domesticated vehicle reversed underfoot? (6)
- Make stronger lime and clay (6)
- Kept to red's arrangement (6)

Down

- Sees timepieces (6)
- Slightly coloured from statin tedium (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List



POETRY CORNER

Water, Water Everywhere and A Load of Old Bull To Make You Thirsty Enough to Think

WILLIAM BULLIN

When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?
When Eve named the flowers and Adam, the bears,
Who got the bonuses and who sold the shares?
When Adam drew water and Eve took the honey,
Who made the breakfast and who made the money?
When England was conquered and taxed through the years,
Who made the profits and who shed the tears?
When crusaders went killing, sword in the hand,
Who stole the water and bloodied the land?
When bottles of water were passed out for free,
Who flooded the Town and polluted the sea?
And when Israel bombed Gaza and Cain killed Abel,
Who sold the weaponry under the table?

John Ball (1338-1381 a Revolting Peasant) versus John Bull
(10 Downing Street).

CRICKET

Scowen Leads From The Front

11 May:
HASTINGS PRIORY 316 FOR 5;
ROFFEY 306 FOR 9

18 May:
HASTINGS PRIORY 204 FOR 8;
EAST GRINSTEAD 104 ALL OUT

HUGH SULLIVAN

The cricketers of Hastings & St Leonards Priory have won their opening two matches in the Sussex Premier League this season. Both matches were contested on a limited 50-over format, but in contrasting conditions.

On the first day of the campaign, under bright sunshine, they travelled to Horsham side, Roffey, hit their highest league score for several years and squeezed victory by ten runs. Seven days later, on a slow damp pitch at Horntye after early morning rain, they only topped 200 in their fiftieth over, but then skittled visitors East Grinstead to win by a commanding 100 runs.

Central to both performances were centuries by new captain Harry Scowen - a fluent 121 against Roffey off only 112 balls; then a more watchful 106 against East Grinstead - followed in each case by accurate bowling from Priory's medium pace attack.

At Roffey, the Hastings side were required to bat first after Scowen lost the toss - a contrast from last season when then captain Tom Gillespie almost invariably managed to win it and chose to bat second. Dylan Woolley went cheaply, but Scowen shared a second wicket partnership of 217 with Aussie returnee Alex Osborne, his innings including ten fours and eight sixes while Osborne's 78 runs were also scored with plenty of confident belligerence. Scowen was eventually run out, and Osborne caught, but a further 88 runs were plundered in the final 11 overs as Seaver Cowley (23), debutant Adam Keane (30) and Greg Devlin (26 not out) all cashed in on tired bowling.

Roffey set off at a gallop in pursuit, with a partnership of 111 for the first wicket in less than 20 overs. When they reached 200 in the 33rd over with only one wicket down - three overs quicker than Priory to the same score - they seemed clear favourites to go on to win. But Cowley had Usman Khan (47), Jon Phelps (0) and Matt Davies (73) all caught at the wicket by Scowen, and Iden McCleave pitched in with a couple of middle order wickets in an economical spell. The home side could not maintain mo-

mentum and finished eight runs short with nine wickets down.

BACK AT HORNTYE

Back in Hastings last Saturday, in Priory's first home league game at Horntye since 2021, Scowen again lost the toss and was again invited to bat first. This time his century was compiled off 149 balls, with just eight fours and two sixes, mostly thwacked to the legside boundary when East Grinstead's bowlers lost their length. He was usefully partnered by Woolley (13), then by Osborne (17), but when their departures were followed by quick dismissals of Cowley and Keane, Priory had subsided to 104 for four.

Former captain Gillespie, batting at six, might have followed them cheaply as well but, reprieved when his top-edged shot to square leg was dropped, he shared in a crucial stand of 78 with the centurion. The visitors fielded keenly in the deep but dropped a number of other catches from which their hosts duly profited.

Priory's final team score of 204 for eight looked eminently defensible in the conditions, and so it proved. The visitors started brightly enough in the first ten overs bowled by Adam Barton and John Morgan, but the introduction of Adam Page (3 for 23) in the eleventh over and Cowley (2 for 26) in the twelfth started wickets tumbling. McCleave (4 for 7 in four overs) dispatched the tail.

The Hastings side are one of three teams (out of ten) in the league that have won both opening matches - the others are Bognor Regis and Preston Nomads. Tomorrow they play away against 2023 champions Cuckfield; a week later (June 1) they will host Middleton.



Harry Scowen after century at Horntye

TENNIS

Downgrade for Devonshire Park



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Many of the world's top tennis players will arrive in Eastbourne next month for the annual international tennis tournament. Between 22 and 29 June the lawns of Devonshire Park will host another combined WTA and ATP Tour event - that's the top level of global competition for women and men respectively - sponsored by Rothesay.

It's been a traditional warm-up for Wimbledon, which starts the following week, as players dust the clay off their shoes following the European clay court season, and adapt themselves to the very different surface on which the game started - English grass. For many years it was a women-only tournament, awarded the highest status, WTA 500, on the world's tennis itinerary.

Last year, seven of the world's top ten ranked women competed, including Coco Gauff and Ons Jabeur. The event was won by Madison Keys. This year Keys will be back as well as Naomi Osaka (former world no.1, returning to the circuit after a period of maternity). Current British no.1 Katie Boulter is among others who have confirmed entry. All seats for centre court matches from the Wednesday (26 June) onwards have long since been sold out.

But from next year the status of the event has been downgraded. While Eastbourne will still host a championship tournament, graded as WTA 250, the English Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) intends to extend its pre-Wimbledon men's tournament at Queen's Club in West London to include women, with the WTA 500 status duly transferred. The incentives offered to players, both in cash rewards and in world

ranking points, to play there rather than at Eastbourne will result in few, if any, high-ranking players continuing to come to East Sussex.

VICTIM OF SUCCESS

From the LTA's perspective, the Devonshire Park event has fallen victim to its own success. The Association describes it as having "always punched above its weight in terms of popularity amongst the players base" - i.e. players like playing there. The stadium court has a capacity of 8,000, only a few hundred less than Queens. But the London club has a far more impressive array of back-room hospitality facilities, and there are presumed to be major economic advantages in extending the existing tournament there to a second week.

A press release from the LTA describes the WTA 500 event as having "grown significantly at Eastbourne, and we feel women's tennis would benefit from a significant uplift for fans in an iconic venue with a larger seating capacity...taking advantage of the infrastructure already in place and exposure that being in the capital provides".

So what's the future for the Devonshire Park lawns, where tennis has been played since 1879? The LTA says it remains committed to long term investment there, and that "the same number of players will still be travelling to Eastbourne and playing the event, the same number of matches will be played for fans to enjoy".

Whether in future years spectators flock in the same numbers, and are willing to pay the same levels of ticket prices, remains to be seen.

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