

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



10
YEARS OF
INDEPENDENT
JOURNALISM



**Calling
Cat Lovers**



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**Art That
Won't Fit**

Recycling Scheme Booking 'Bonkers'

KENT BARKER

HIP Readers have condemned Council proposals to introduce a booking system at recycling sites.

East Sussex County Council is considering introducing a booking system for its household waste recycling sites, including Hastings'

Freshfields in Bexhill. But if the response of our readers is anything to go by, the idea is getting a very frosty reception. "Booking is NOT going to encourage recycling, just make it harder," said one reader on Instagram.

The County Council says "Booking systems for Household Waste Recycling Site (HWRS) visits are currently used successfully in Kent, West



DAVE YOUNG



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EDITOR'S NOTE

It's no secret our cash-strapped local authorities are under immense pressure. However, East Sussex County Council - never overly committed to a green agenda - seem to have lost all perspective by suggesting a booking system at the Bulverhythe waste and recycling centre. To avoid fly-tipping, the idea is surely to make the process easier, not put people off.

They could do worse than follow the example of local community co-operative, Energise South Coast, who are running training sessions for volunteers to provide energy advice to help local people keep warm and reduce their bills. Find how to sign up in our Community section, which also celebrate 'transformative' Energise director Kate Meakin's national award for her contribution to alleviating energy poverty.

While everyone agrees the country needs a lot of new affordable homes, two writers on the Opinion page have sharply different views on how this goal might best be achieved. Also, concerning houses, we've an intriguing feature on the interior of an iconic Old Town residence.

Meanwhile our Arts previews and reviews run the gamut of choirs, theatre, printmaking, sculpture and Agatha Christie-inspired paintings. Plus, listings of gigs, events and classes all over town.

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News

Reform Politician
Sidelined

PAUL McLAUGHLIN

The former Hastings Borough Councillor, Lucian Fernando, claims he has been sacked by Southeastern railway because of his political views. Mr Fernando, who represented the Silverhill ward for Reform UK until his defeat in May's local elections said the action taken by the train operator amounted to a "political dismissal".

He was employed by Southeastern railway in 2021 as an agency worker and taken on full-time in March 2024. Mr Fernando was a platform staff member working at Tunbridge Wells station. He told HIP he was given no warning of his dismissal but that a complaint was made against him arising from his political views. He was informed on 15 November that his employment was to be terminated. He insists that the train company was "fully aware"

that he was politically active, and that he has "always been open and transparent about his political life."

Since he lost his Silverhill seat in May and came third as a Hastings and Rye candidate in July's General Election with 16% of the vote, he has continued to act as a local spokesperson for Reform UK. Mr Fernando said he was "stunned" by the news and that he had not been told his job was at risk nor had he been given any written warning about any alleged misconduct. He said it seemed his "political opinions, expressed in a private capacity and not linked to his role at Southeastern, had been used as grounds for dismissal."

With a Churchillian flourish he said, "Freedom of speech and opinion is the right of everyone in a democratic country and the termination of my employment under these circumstances is deeply troubling and raises serious concerns about how these rights are being undermined for everyone."

A Southeastern Railway spokesperson gave a more Attlean response saying, "this individual was on probation and their employment was ended in accordance with our processes. As part of this they were given the opportunity to respond to the concerns raised about their conduct with colleagues, time-keeping, multiple absences and other reported actions."

Wrigleys solicitors who specialise in employment cases say employees can bring an unfair dismissal claim without having two years' continuous employment if the principal reason for the dismissal is, or relates to, the employee's political opinions or affiliation. A spokesperson said, "Dismissal because of or relating to political opinion or affiliation will not be *automatically* unfair - unlike, for example, health and safety or whistleblowing related dismissals." She said a tribunal will consider whether the dismissal was fair in all the circumstances, including the process followed by the employer. However, where an employee has been dismissed in breach of Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights specifying the right to freedom of association and the right to join political parties, it is likely that the dismissal



DAVE YOUNG

al will be found to be unfair.

Mr Fernando's initial anger has been replaced by a steely determination to fight for his job. He has engaged an employment lawyer to take his case to ACAS, the arbitration service, to try and resolve the problem without having to go to an employment tribunal. He has also written to Helena Dollimore, the Labour MP for Hastings and Rye, Sally-Ann Hart, the former Conservative MP, and to local councillors and trades union officials seeking their support.

1 Sussex and Hampshire" and they claim it could "help save as much as £50,000 a year."

When we asked our readers on social media for their views, they gave a universal thumbs down, with not a single positive response. One Hastings resident said: "I'd rather queue than have to book. It's more convenient. Who ever plans a trip to the tip? If a booking system is introduced, it won't be long before start charging." Others said: "Why? It works as it is now!"; "Bonkers"; "What a stupid idea. No reason for it." and "Brace ourselves for an increase in fly tipping."

East Sussex has a 'network' of ten sites which between them get more than

a million visits a year and they say they are getting busier. They argue that around half the councils in England operate some sort of booking system many providing the ability to book on the day, through mobile apps, by telephone or on the web. The introduction of a booking system here would, they say, mean less queuing, less congestion at the site, and would act as a deterrent to traders trying to tip business waste for free.

But local residents believe it would be "asking for trouble", and one sarcastically posted: "There's so little to do in Hastings that the council has decided to make the tip its big cultural attraction. So obviously ticketing is needed."

Additional reporting Erin Ward.

HASTINGS TIDES									
DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES				SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON		
FRI 6 DEC	H 1:44am	L 8:31am	H 2:01pm	L 8:49pm	6:58	4:23			
SAT 7 DEC	H 2:32am	L 9:18am	H 2:59pm	L 9:40pm	7:00	4:21			
SUN 8 DEC	H 3:28am	L 10:13am	H 4:03pm	L 10:40pm	7:02	4:20	FIRST		
MON 9 DEC	H 4:28am	L 11:18am	H 5:12pm	L 11:49pm	7:03	4:18			
TUES 10 DEC	H 5:35am	L 12:29pm	H 6:19pm		7:05	4:17			
WEDS 11 DEC	L 1:01am	H 6:41am	L 1:37pm	H 7:22pm	7:07	4:16			
THURS 12 DEC	L 2:04am	H 7:42am	L 2:40pm	H 8:22pm	7:08	4:14			
FRI 13 DEC	L 3:04am	H 8:40am	L 3:59pm	H 9:18pm	7:10	4:12			
SAT 14 DEC	L 4:02am	H 9:35am	L 4:36pm	H 10:11pm	7:13	4:11			
SUN 15 DEC	L 4:58am	H 10:27am	L 5:30pm	H 11:02pm	7:13	4:10	FULL		
MON 16 DEC	L 5:48am	H 11:18am	L 6:21pm	H 11:48pm	7:15	4:09			
TUES 17 DEC	L 6:38am	H 12:05pm	L 7:07pm		7:17	4:07			
WEDS 18 DEC	H 03:1am	L 7:25am	H 12:48pm	L 7:51pm	7:18	4:06			
THURS 19 DEC	H 1:12am	L 8:08am	H 1:31pm	L 8:30am	7:20	4:05			

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



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WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

✉Letter

HOUSING FOR LOCALS

Dear HIP

No matter how many new houses are built or where they are situated, this will do nothing to alleviate the local housing shortage unless some means can be found to ensure that they are reserved for occupation by local people. Otherwise most of them will simply be snapped up by Londoners offering prices way beyond the ability of local people to match, leaving just as many homeless as before.

The obvious way to achieve this of course would be for the new developments to be Council owned,

but I have the impression that the Council is simply not in a position to finance such projects at the moment. Some other way must be found.

And don't be fooled by developers' promises to provide a quota of 'affordable' or 'social' housing. Don't forget the scandal of the Station Plaza complex in 2016 when the developer John Laing promised 103 new homes of which 30% would be 'affordable'. Then, having bagged planning permission on that basis, they weaseled out of that promise claiming it had suddenly become "uneconomic" to abide by it - and the Council let them get away with it.

Peter Bolwell

NEWS IN BRIEF

CHANGE AT THE TOP

Hastings Borough Council has appointed an interim Chief Executive on a part-time job-share basis. Robert Cottrill will share the role with Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough councils.

The appointment is for an 'initial' six-month period, and Mr Cotterill will continue as the chief executive of the other councils, dividing his time between each authority. HBC has recently also been sharing "a limited amount of officer capacity" with Lewes and Eastbourne. A spokesperson for HBC said "This new arrangement further strengthens our partnership with colleagues in Lewes and Eastbourne and enables the council to fully consider options for a permanent chief executive appointment."

Mystery still surrounds the departure of HBC's last Chief Executive, Jane Hartnell, who "stepped down from her post by mutual agreement" at the end of October. The council issued a brief press release at the time helpfully stating "there will be no further comments made".

WATER COMPENSATION

Hastings MP Helena Dollimore has called on David Black, the Chief Executive of water regulator OFWAT, for an urgent decision on compensation for 30,000 local residents who lost supplies for up to five days in May.

Ms Dollimore told him "Southern Water have tried to wriggle out of their legal duties citing exceptional circumstances... six months on from this water outage I would be grateful for OFWAT to rule whether compensation is due in this incident."

The MP questioned Mr Black at the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee on 26 November and in a follow-up letter said: "As evidenced by the planning application ref RR/2006/3499 that refers to a need to replace 'existing outworn raw water pipeline', it appears that Southern Water knew as far back as 2007 that the water pipeline concerned needed replacing. Therefore, it is hard to see how they can claim exceptional circumstances."

EASY MONEY

Hastings Borough Council is inviting applications for grants from the latest iteration of the Household Support Fund – a £421 million government programme with a cat's cradle of strings attached. Households who can demonstrate they are finding it difficult to pay for the cost of food, energy and water can apply as long as they are over 18, are Hastings residents, and have less than £6,000 in savings. Furthermore, they must be receiving Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and/or Universal Credit with Housing Costs, and must not be eligible to receive the winter fuel payment. They cannot have received grants from the previous round of funding that ended in September. The council says the fund will close on 31 March 2025 or when the money has been allocated "whichever comes first". And anyone subject to 'immigration control' is excluded. Furthermore, you can only apply online.

hastings.gov.uk/benefits/hsfund

We would love to hear from you.

✉ letters@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk

📘 facebook.com/hastingsindependent

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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

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As You Were at Azur

HUGH SULLIVAN

Repair works “remain under way” at the Azur Marina Pavilion, according to head lessee Sea Change Sussex. Drainage problems are said to have been largely resolved through repairs to pipes; the restoration of mains power in conjunction with UK Power Networks has been “complicated by the involvement of cables serving several nearby properties”.

The venue has been closed since previous leaseholders departed in January, and although the agents Fleurets have marked it on their website as “Sold subject to contract”, Sea Change continues to deny that any offer has been accepted from a chosen operator.

Hastings Borough Council, though it owns the freehold of the property and has been involved in

the repair work, has no active involvement in marketing the property and will not vet prospective buyers or tenants, leaving that process to Sea Change. A council spokesperson said it will require information that shows the under-lessee is able to perform the financial and other obligations set out in the lease.

The financial performance of previous underlessees suggests that process has not been robustly performed in the past: all three companies - Lightening Leisure Ltd, Azur Marina Ltd and Azur Events Ltd each controlled by David Thorpe-Tracey - successively collapsed into insolvency over a 13-year period.

The council could also have a more direct influence on the current behaviour of Sea Change by restoring a representative as director on the company's board – a right they have under its constitution.



SUSAN MCCLE

Between 2011 and 2022 successive council leaders, Peter Chowney, Kim Forward and Paul Barnett took up this role. Cllr Barnett resigned in March 2022 without replacement.

A motion to appoint Green Party councillor Darren Mackenzie to the Sea Change board as the council's representative was due for discussion in cabinet this week.

The council could also affect future leasehold occupation by

more rigorous licensing of the premises and active scrutiny of its effects. Local community groups benefited from Mr Thorpe-Tracey's open door policy in recent years, but neighbouring residents have complained that, under his successive regimes, a high level of anti-social behaviour fuelled by alcohol and drug abuse by customers was tolerated. Will a new owner change Azur's profile?

Meanwhile a fresh lease of the Sussex Exchange hospitality centre on Queensway, which was trading as a cinema, conference centre and restaurant until its operators went bust in July, is now being actively negotiated. A spokesperson for Sea Change, also the head lessee of this property, announced last week that an offer had been accepted, though it has so far declined to identify the prospective new operator.

Hastings Gets Baton of Hope

CHRIS CONNELLEY

Established by former broadcast journalist Mike McCarthy in response to the suicide of his son, Ross, Baton of Hope (BoH) is a charity and campaign group that aims to raise awareness and prevention of the issue, as well as to support those affected.

Working with Steve Phillips, whose son also committed suicide, McCarthy developed the concept of the 'Baton of Hope' as a means of engaging people across the country.

The concept was to use a public procession with a baton passed by survivors and their families, demonstrating solidarity and acting as a beacon of hope.

Its first nationwide tour in 2023 visited a dozen locations, including Brighton, before heading to central London. It involved 1,000 torch bearers from those directly affected, signed up scores of celebrity advocates and generated 3 million hits on social media.

Next year's second national tour will almost double in size, with 20 locations taking part, including Hastings, the smallest host town.



Mazin Al-Julaili Mr Hastings and St Leonards and Mike McCarthy Baton of Hope.

The baton will arrive here on Tuesday 23 September, when organisers plan a range of activities.

Our presence on next year's map follows an application by local men's group, 'Mr Hastings and St Leonards' (MHSL), which has been campaigning for better support for men and focusing on physical and

mental health.

Supported by HVA (Hastings Voluntary Action), MHSL have worked on projects over the past couple of years, including hosting a podcast, running a weekly Thursday night men's group at Stade Hall, and bringing national wellbeing group, Talk Club, to Hastings.

Mazin Al-Julaili - Maz, a founder of MHSL, said he came across the Baton of Hope whilst attending a Talk Club in Mike's hometown, Sheffield, and felt that a coastal location like Hastings, with its complex set of health inequalities, would be a suitable candidate for the 2025 tour. Hastings Samaritans highlighted the town's higher than average suicide statistics, at 11.9 deaths per 100,000 compared to the national average of 10.6. Rebecca Swann, CEO of training provider Grassroots, estimates that for every suicide 135 other people are affected.

All funding for the Baton of Hope needs to be locally generated and the group are seeking volunteers to help with fundraising and organisation of the Batons visit.

To find out more, contact mens-room.community

County Cuts Cost Hastings

PAUL McLAUGHLIN

Hastings could be left to 'pick up the pieces' from the County's massive Social Services budget cuts, according to Borough Council leader Julia Hilton.

East Sussex County Council faces a £57 million gap in its finances and has been consulting over possible £12 million 'savings' including £4

million cuts in Adult Social Services.

Hastings Borough Council (HBC) has written to East Sussex County Council (ESCC) about proposed cuts to Support Services which, Julia Hilton warns, will have a significant impact on Hastings residents “and especially residents facing the most barriers to living and thriving independently.”

ESCC is responsible for providing adult social care services, including dealing with drug and alcohol mis-

use, and supported accommodation for those with mental health needs. In October, the leader of the County Council, Keith Glazier, warned the impending funding gap in the Council's finances would make it 'almost impossible' to maintain current levels of service provision in the year ahead.

A series of consultations from the County Council closed on 28 November. In her letter Cllr Hilton acknowledged the “extremely challenging financial situation ESCC is facing.” However, she warned that any savings made by the County Council would “just shift potentially increased costs” onto Hastings, which would be left to pick up the pieces.

She pointed to proposed reductions to funding Temporary Accom-

modation (TA). ESCC plans 88% cuts to the 'Floating Support Contract' with the Brighton Housing Trust which provides short-term lets to households. The Trust dealt with 276 referrals within Hastings last year and HBC says the cuts are likely to result in at least a 50% increase in costs for them and mean homeless households would spend twice as long waiting for a permanent home.

ESCC proposals to cut funding for supported accommodation could also result in Sanctuary Supported Living closing its Priory Avenue and Bal Edmund projects in Hastings, costing HBC almost half a million pounds. HBC would also be required to accommodate the 31 households currently housed in the projects.

The proposed cuts to recovery

services for drug and alcohol misuse will also have a huge impact across Hastings. Cllr Hilton estimated that over 50% of all crime and disorder in Hastings is drug and alcohol related, costing tens of millions to the taxpayer. Many of the street community members seen in Hastings in recent years have substance misuse issues. She believes withdrawing or limiting these services will undoubtedly depress town centre business investment and increase residents' fears of shopping in the town. It would also lead to an increase in people facing street homelessness and poverty which in turn will increase the demands on community safety partners, such as Sussex Police and indeed to ESCC's other support services.

BLUEBELL RIDGE



Calling All Cat Lovers

MARIE ASHTON, Branch Manager of Bluebell Ridge RSPCA animal shelter, reminds our readers of the important work they do

Bluebell Ridge RSPCA animal shelter is holding an open day on 8 December where you can find out about our branch and the important work we do – as well as enjoying some fun activities and Christmas refreshments. This will be our first open day since lockdown so please come along for this special day. All proceeds go towards running the branch.

Our Hastings-based animal shelter is an independent branch of the RSPCA covering a large area from Rye to the edge of Eastbourne and the whole of Rother, taking in abused and abandoned cats from local RSPCA Inspectors. We help hundreds of local animals, looking after their wellbeing, ensuring their medical needs are met and getting them ready for a new home. The branch also provides vet welfare and neutering assistance to the local community for dogs, cats and rabbits. As a self-funding, RSPCA branch, we need to raise £200,000 a year to operate.

We'd love to increase the number of animals we help each year and, to do this, we are looking for local people who can offer their homes to foster cats in our care. Fostering gives people who would not normally be able to take in a cat an opportunity to look after and enjoy their companionship, which can be very satisfying to experience. You'll also

play a key part in helping a rescued cat recover from a life of suffering to start a whole new life.

Cats come with unique personalities: here's Nancy's story of fostering cats with very different dispositions: "I became a fostering volunteer in January this year and I've cared for three cats. It's a very rewarding experience to be able to care for and provide a loving home to a little animal who may have been through great hardship in their life. The three cats I've looked after have had very different characters. Socks was very young, full of beans and constantly wanting attention! Ginny was much more timid and nervous, but gradually she started to trust me and enjoyed a fuss every day! Jessie was the perfect cat, very easy to look after and a relaxed and affectionate girl. If you love cats but can't commit to looking after one forever, fostering is a great way to enjoy a cat's company and help them on their journey to adoption. I would thoroughly recommend it!"



For more information visit bluebell-ridge.org. To register for the open day, go to bit.ly/3UEX2bc or call 01424 752121.



Digital Learning Skills Training at the White Rock

It was recently announced that the White Rock Theatre, operated by The Guildhall Trust, is to receive £25,000, awarded by East Sussex County Council from the Hastings Skills Capital Fund. The funding is to be used to create a bespoke Digital Learning Suite for the delivery and development of digital skills training that will help nurture and retain local creative talent.

Altering the layout and renovating a currently under-utilised space within the venue, the new learning facility will be equipped with high-quality technology including a large digital screen, sound recording equipment, high-speed internet connection and Mac minicomputers with Adobe Creative Suite software.

The Learning Suite will provide training in sound, lighting, production and design, digital marketing. There is also a plan for bitesize workshops that will support local creative development and deliver an expanded work experience offer. The multifunctional space will also be available to other creative organisations and groups within the region, making it a valuable asset for the Hastings community and helping the creative sector to recruit and retain key talent where it is needed.

The project is one of eleven to receive a share in £1 million of funding from UK Government, awarded by East Sussex County Council from the Hastings and Rother Skills Capital Funds, to help enhance the local skills and training offer in line with the priorities of Skills East Sussex, the local multi-agency strategic skills board.

The board aims to support the local economy and residents by building a skilled workforce and offering relevant training for young people and adults. It also focuses on maximising the benefits of future opportunities related to new technology and net zero.

Work on installing The Learning

Suite will start in January and is expected to be completed by the end of March. It is the latest in a series of investments in the White Rock by The Guildhall Trust since it took over

the operation of the venue last year.

Other improvements include creating a new Studio performance space with new flooring, lighting, bars and the addition of a dressing room. The renovated Studio space is also available to hire for meetings and social events. A full rock PA system has also been installed in the main auditorium, and this is already attracting a wide range of artists back into the venue.

Chief Executive Officer of The Guildhall Trust, Andy Grays says: "The Hastings community has been so warm in its welcome to The Guildhall Trust since February, it's fantastic to be developing these learning facilities and delivering what we always promised we would. The support of the community is vital to the venue's continued success, and we encourage everyone to make sure they are signed up to our mailing list and follow us on socials. The future of White Rock looks very exciting!"



To find out more about The White Rock and The Guildhall Trust, and sign up to the mailing list, head to: whiterocktheatre.org.uk



Ceramics Sale

14th and 21st Dec. 10am-5pm

Ceramic Advent Calendar 1-24th Dec.

instagram @stleonardsceramics

Each day a featured work will be revealed for sale from one of the students, members and teachers

36 Marina, St Leonards on Sea, TN38 0JY
www.stleonardsceramics.co.uk

The Power of Nature and Community

WE ARE A SEA, a weekend of joyful activities celebrating local heroes, has been captured on film and bottled for future viewing.

Local activist, Beccy McCray, was inspired by the recent *Seeds of Hope* campaign launched by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This aimed to showcase the power of nature and community to tackle key issues that particularly affect vulnerable communities, such as cost of living, mental health, and the climate and nature crises. And hope is definitely worth nurturing and sharing in Hastings.

As part of the national festivities, she organised WE ARE A SEA, two days of events on the weekend of 28/29 September "to celebrate stories of possibility and solidarity in

a world where governments have fallen short, and a world where hope is in the shadows whilst doom is in the mainstream." She says: "I wanted to bring people together, shifting narratives away from polarisation and separation (from each other and the natural world), and instead, speak of interdependence and community."

A short video has now been made to remind us of the event, a weekend featuring a mixture of joyful activities celebrating the 'Hastings Heroes' who help keep their seas and shoreline clean, safe, and welcoming.

The event was branded WE ARE A SEA as a new headline for Hastings, "one which reflected the growing ocean of hope bubbling away



ALICE DENNY

get back out and show our support for each other – be visible and take up public space." She says the day was spent painting the 'steps of hope' on the seafront opposite Warrior Square.

And from One Hastings Many Voices: "It was the only beautiful sunny day that week and everyone joined in, painting and eating lovely food made at Dove Cafe and donated by many local businesses."

WE ARE A SEA found a way to connect the diverse array of artists, groups, venues and change-makers involved, linking them together in Action Hubs along the seafront. Groups such as Clean Water Action, Yoga by the Sea, Hastings Bike Project (all pretty much self-explanatory) and Pebbledash (involving running over the pebbly beaches – and sand – sometimes with competitive litter pickings).



Go to weareasea.net for programme of events and more details of participants. Scan QR code to find video of event beccymccray-workwork.com/creative-director/weareasea.

within the town," Becky explained on the website. "We are a sea and together we make waves."

"The event was timely," says Rosana Leal, CEO of the Refugee Buddy Project. "It was just after the

horrible race riots. We at the Buddy Project provided lots of emotional support to our local communities who were very scared and still in fear of leaving their houses. The festival was a chance for all of us to

Healthy Conservation at Church Wood



Carrie Edmonds and volunteers at Church Wood

ROD WEBB

We're all aware of the New Year rush to get fit after festive overindulgence – and how it is often doomed to failure. So why not start thinking about getting fit now, as we approach the depths of winter? The Hastings branch of the Conservation Volunteers (TCV) has just set up a Green Gym at Church Wood Nature Reserve in St Leonards, where you can not only enjoy the benefits of outdoor exercise in the company of others but also get involved with taking care of the woodland; physical and mental fitness in one package.

The half-day volunteering sessions are part of TCV's national Green Gym programme that helps people to connect with nature and boost their health whilst doing something good for the environment. The first Hastings Green Gym was launched at the Conquest Hospital earlier this year (See Issue 257 *New Green Gym at Conquest Hospital*).

TCV Senior Project Officer, Carrie Edmonds, says: "We all know that being more active is good for your health, but it can be difficult to keep up the motivation. Our Green Gym volunteers can see they are enhancing nature and making their green spaces better for everyone, which they find really rewarding. This is

what keeps them coming back, getting regular exercise, meeting new friends and making a positive impact locally."

She explained that activities can be made as easy as people like: "It doesn't need to be too strenuous; a few hours in the woods is great for everyone!" You can find out more about the national Green Gyms programme at tcv.org.uk/greengym.

The first session at Church Wood was on Thursday 21 November 2024 and the volunteers started thinning areas that were becoming overgrown. This means that more sunlight will reach the woodland floor next Spring and give even more wildflowers a chance.

The Church Wood Green Gym sessions are every Thursday from 10.00am to 1.00pm, with the next ones before Christmas on 12 and 19 December. Volunteers can get a lift in the minibus from the TCV office on Fearon Road, TN34 2DL, or meet in the car park.

TCV also runs the extensive East Sussex Health Walks programme of free one-hour group walks with four every week in the Hastings area. Both projects are funded by East Sussex County Council as part of the public health programme.

We hope this will encourage you to make a start for a healthy and happy New Year!



For more information on Church Wood or Conquest Hospital Green Gyms go to tinyurl.com/tcvsussex, follow TCV Sussex on Facebook or contact Carrie Edmonds on carrie.edmonds@tcv.org.uk / 07764 655609.

The Return of the Giving Tree

Priory Meadow is bringing back their Charity Giving Tree as a centrepiece for the shopping centre this Christmas for the seventh year running. The idea is to encourage visitors to buy a Christmas gift for the children of local families using Hastings Foodbank while out shopping.

Hastings Foodbank is part of a nationwide network of foodbanks, supported by The Trussell Trust, working to combat poverty and hunger across the UK.

Cheryl Carey, Hastings Foodbank Co-Manager, says: "Christmas is a difficult time if you are struggling to make ends meet. Families suffer anxiety and guilt at not being able to give their children a present at Christmas even though they are struggling to pay their bills and eat," adding her thanks to Priory Meadow "for helping support those in our community who are finding it particularly difficult right now".

Shoppers can join the initiative, which is already live, by selecting a tag from the trees located outside Marks and Spencer, purchasing a suitable gift, then taking the gift and tag to Kids Stuff Toys, who are kindly hosting the donation point.

All gifts should be new and should not be perishable. They should also be donated unwrapped so that each child can receive a suitable gift. "We are passionate about this initiative with our wonderful charity partner," Shopping Centre Manager Andy Harvey says.



"Each year the generosity of our shoppers exceeds our expectations, and we receive hundreds of gifts for the children. On behalf of Priory Meadow and Hastings Foodbank, we would like to say thank you in advance."

He also makes a special request for donations aimed at pre-teens and teenagers – to compensate for a tendency to buy gifts for babies and younger children. Suggestions include books, toiletries, make-up, accessories, stationery and gift vouchers.



For more information on Priory Meadow Shopping Centre visit priorymeadow.com For more information on Hastings Foodbank visit hastings.foodbank.org.uk

Free Training for Energy Champions

Local community energy cooperative Energise Sussex Coast are holding a free one-day interactive training at the White Rock Hotel in Hastings on Tuesday 17 December. The training is aimed at local people who are passionate about making a difference to the environment and the welfare of their local community.

The training will enable attendees to give free energy advice to local people, helping them to save energy and bring down their bills. It will also introduce participants to the broader world of community energy projects, including thermal imaging and community solar. No previous experience is necessary.

Topics covered will include basic ways to stop energy wastage such as draught-proofing and the use of boiler and heating controls, how to read an energy bill, the Priority

Services Register (what it is and who it can help) and the various different discounts and schemes available to help people with their bills: for example, fuel vouchers and the Warm Home Discount.

Participants will also receive ongoing training and support from Energise Sussex Coast, empowering them to organise events and local activities around energy-saving and renewable energy. Energy Champions are expected to volunteer for around four hours a month following the training.

Local Energy Champions have recently held advice stalls at apple-pressing events in Crowborough and Hastings and at the Alfriston Fayre, and have been running a month-long series of Eco-Open Homes events across the county.

The training on 17 December will

be run by Energise Sussex Coast's Chris Richards; he started as an Energy Champion himself back in 2012 and has been involved in community energy projects ever since – most recently with the anaerobic bio-digester in Woody Wood in Hastings. He says: "Becoming an Energy Champion is very rewarding as it's a chance to genuinely help people in a very tangible way.

"Champions not only address the cost-of-living crisis by helping to bring down energy costs, but they also do something about climate change by bringing down carbon emissions."

The Hastings Energy Champion Training, which will run from 10.00am-4.30pm, is open to anyone living in Hastings and St Leonards. Refreshments and a free vegetarian lunch will be provided. Those wanting to attend should register for free on Eventbrite tinyurl.com/energy-champ17dec. Other training sessions are taking place in Eastbourne, Crowborough, Saltdean and Bexhill. Anyone interested in attending those should email chris@energisesussexcoast.co.uk.



Award for Transformative Local Director

The director of local community energy co-operative Energise Sussex Coast, Kate Meakin, has won a national award recognising "one exceptional individual, in England, that has made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of the community energy sector or driven/delivered a particularly significant impact or success."

The *Community Energy Champion (individual)* award was presented to Kate at the Community Energy England Awards 2024 in Bristol on Friday 22 November. Community Energy England represents over 300 community energy and associated organisations across England. Founded in 2012, Energise Sussex Coast works across East Sussex to tackle the climate crisis and energy injustice through community-owned renewable power and energy-saving schemes. Its sister co-op, Energise South, has raised community invest-

ment to finance and install solar arrays on nine community buildings, including Baird Primary School and St Leonards Academy.

According to Community Energy England: "Kate Meakin's influence on Energise Sussex Coast is nothing short of transformative. Her blend of strategic vision, innovative leadership, and compassionate community engagement has not only ensured the sustainability of ESC but has also significantly enhanced the quality of life for countless residents facing energy poverty. Without her, the achievements of ESC would not have been remotely possible."

Kate Meakin says: "I'm really proud of what we've achieved at Energise Sussex Coast, from helping hundreds of people every year with our energy advice service to developing innovative new solar projects. It means a lot to get recognition nationally."



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Let Us Have Homes

Architect and planner KEN DAVIS calls for a public land company with statutory powers to force institutions to release unused plots for housing

Some 26 years ago, when I was studying for a Masters in Urban Regeneration, I came across the work of Manchester-based URBED (the Urban and Economic Development Group) who had worked on a number of urban regeneration projects. At that time they produced a very informative newspaper titled 'SUN' (Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods), which was all about making existing urban areas more liveable, more attractive (to people and businesses), and more sustainable.

I sent copies of these newspapers to all of the then Labour Councillors at HBC because I thought they might want to see some better quality urban development in Hastings. I had

not a single reply or sign of interest, and to this day do not know if this was the result of a lack of interest or if they thought I must surely be eccentric to believe that Hastings was worth the sort of betterment proposed by the work of URBED.

In the interim quarter of a century, I have witnessed some pretty appalling developments by both government agencies and private developers. Perhaps the worst aspect of all this is not only that the same basic mistakes go on being made (look at attempts to build on floodable land like Pebsham/Bexhill Road, building office blocks that remain empty, unfinished roads), but also the now surely recognised

absurdity of building a shopping centre at the bottom of a valley.

But long before my discovery of URBED I fell upon a wonderful article that all good local authority managers and especially town planners will know about, which is titled *The Science of Muddling Through* in the Journal of Public Administration. It makes the case that public bodies have, by their nature, to be cautious as protectors of public money. Such caution is also a result of the uncertainties of our political system and of public servants protecting their jobs; if unsure, then don't do it. This leads to both very slow and very incremental change.

So how does all this help us in securing more and better housing?

Firstly, if we are to tackle climate change, and create more and better urban areas, we have to break the silo thinking and acting of our present local government models; quite simply, we have to work in more collaborative and thus more innovative ways.

Just as we now have a public energy company, we should also have



Site for tall block of flats off Queensway?

a public land company which holds a 'terrier' or register of all public land and which has open access. Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, and public bodies like the NHS, the Ministry of Defence, and Railtrack all own land that is not used as efficiently as it could be. Efficient use would be for flats with shared amenity spaces rather than private gardens.

We are all aware of the number of empty shops in Hastings, but how do we keep an active retail offer and create more housing? Shops are traditionally of narrow frontage and deep plan. What if we turned that around and put housing behind

wide frontage, shallow depth (perhaps only one isle) shops. Ok, so it's not that easy and requires some detailed consideration and different variations, but does show what a different approach might deliver. Such innovation is held up by lack of imagination and lack of appropriate policy.

Furthermore, we all know that there are plenty of small, awkward sites in town which might become houses or flats, but there is only a very vague design policy which frankly acts more as obstruction than assistance. There are also larger sites, often in public ownership, which could be developed.



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St Helen's Woods Housing Threat

JANET HODGSON, a trustee of the St Helen's Park Preservation Society, says urgent action is needed to protect the Sandrock Bends greenspace from housing that will impact on the woods

You may know that an area of land known as 'Sandrock Bends' – a large triangle between The Ridge and St Helen's Woods opposite the Conqueror's March pub – is currently under consideration for the building of 140 houses. This should be of serious concern to everyone who cares about St Helen's Woods, as well as being potentially disastrous for the town in many different ways.

Many plant and animal species have been found in the green spaces of Sandrock Bends – bats, badgers, dormice, deer, as well as buzzards, woodpeckers and ancient trees. And whilst it would be a great shame if these habitats, plants and wildlife were destroyed by development, it is the wider impact on the ancient woodlands and meadows of St Helen's Woods – a much-loved 100-acre nature reserve in the heart of Hastings – that is also

a particular concern.

It is now well known that biodiversity corridors are vital in strengthening the health and resilience of plants and animals, as well as offering food, shelter and safety for birds, bees, bats and all kinds of wildlife. Fragmented natural spaces – pockets of green space surrounded by human-made hostile environments – are significantly less ecologically healthy and diverse than those connected to the wider natural world.

A critical link – indeed the only remaining link – between St Helen's Woods and the countryside of the High Weald, is the land at Sandrock Bends. This enables small mammals, seeds and insects to travel between St Helen's Woods and the countryside beyond, and thus is essential for the health and vitality of animals, plants and trees in the

future, particularly as we face other threats such as climate change.

The land at Sandrock Bends also acts like a giant green sponge, absorbing surface water. If this land is developed, this water would drain into the streams and valleys of St Helen's Woods, which already suffer under the strain of excess water from development around The Ridge. More water means greater soil erosion, more mudslides and more habitat loss. More polluted water spells even more trouble for the bluebells, rare plant species and insects that currently thrive in the ancient woodland and meadows.

But that's not all...there will also be an increased risk of drainage, sewage and flooding problems that will directly affect the people of Hastings. Anybody who lives downstream from The Ridge will know that a lot of surface water runs into the valleys, paths and roads in and around St Helen's Woods. Without the Sandrock Bends 'green sponge', this can only get worse, and could increase the risk of flooding for the Blacklands area, the town centre and Alexandra Park. If you live downstream of St Helen's Woods, this should be a great concern.

Lastly, as anyone who drives or walks along The Ridge will know, this area is already subject to a great deal of traffic congestion and the corner near Sandrock Bends is an accident hotspot. More traffic driving on, off and along The Ridge can only mean more trouble for car drivers and pedestrians.

For more information visit St Helen's Park Preservation Society at sthelenswoods.co.uk.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE HOMEOWNER, MICHAEL HUNTER



Grand Designs on Other People's Houses!

STEVEN SHORT, a writer, editor and publisher who lives in the Old Town, shares a favourite house

What's your favourite house in Hastings? I know what mine is, and although I don't get to live there, as a HIP contributor I did meet the owner and had a look round, discovering that there's a website that lets you have a good look as well!

When Michael Hunter decided to move to Hastings, he knew he wanted a characterful property in the Old Town, and he knew he wanted a sea view. When he discovered that there was nothing currently on the market, he took a proactive approach and dropped leaflets through the doors of homes he liked that met his criteria.

"I probably leafleted 20 plus houses and quite a few of the owners contacted me," says Michael, Emeritus Professor of History at Birkbeck University of London – this was back in 1991 when the market here wasn't booming. While several owners responded to Michael pretty much immediately, it wasn't until a week or so later that the occupants of a property in an enviable – and elevated – spot on Exmouth Place got in touch.

"I was looking for a rather grand house, because I'd previously lived in interesting or characterful places," says Michael. "As soon as I saw

Exmouth House, I knew it was right."

Michael spent the next two decades restoring the house to its former glory and has just created a fascinating website chronicling not only the work he has done on it but the history of the property, its builder and previous residents, as well as Hastings itself.

"Originally I thought I might write a book about the house because I'm always writing books," says Michael, "but the more research I did and the more I found out, I thought a website would be a way of reaching a bigger audience."

When Michael moved into Exmouth House – a five-bedroom, double-fronted villa commanding arguably one of the best sea views in the Old Town – it had been badly converted into flats. "There was a strange heating system that needed to be removed, I had to open up and restore fireplaces and chimneys," he recounts, as well as putting right years of bad repairs and decorating throughout. "Previous residents had thrown a lot of stuff in the garden, too. There were disused cookers and lots of other junk, so I needed skip after skip to clear it."

It wasn't all dealing with other people's rubbish, however. When a



mysterious slab outside the kitchen was moved, it revealed the house's original well. "It's currently 40 feet deep. There's a deep fissure in the side of it, evidently due to an earth tremor many years ago."

He also discovered the original Georgian vertical sliding sash shutters at the front windows – this now-rare window treatment explains why the exterior walls are so thick as the shutters have to sit inside the walls.

Exmouth House was built by 'Matthew Fagg of Hackney in the County of Middlesex, Gentleman' between 1817 and 1819, coinciding with Hastings becoming a fashionable seaside resort. After years of painstaking work, Michael has a building and a home every bit as grand as it was when it was first built. "I don't intend to do anything else on the house," says Michael. "It's beginning to look a little shabby in parts, but I'm fine with that. It suits the place."

Right next door, No. 5 has a blue plaque in honour of Marie-Louise Cristophe, Queen of Haiti, and her daughters, by Black Butterfly, a cultural heritage group aiming to reveal hidden Black histories in the Hastings area. The plaque was un-



veiled on 3 October, 2022, the bicentenary of their arrival in Hastings in October 1822. A very grand and notable former neighbour!

Historian Roy Porter, a Hastings resident until he died in 2002, used to tell people he thought the Grade II listed Exmouth House was the best house in town. For those who know their finials and newels from their spandrels, British Listed Buildings describes it this way: "Circa 1810. Stuccoed. Parapet. Slate roof. 2 storeys. 5 windows wide. Sash windows, ground floor without glazing bars, centre 1st-floor

trellis balcony with tent-shaped hood, sun-burst spandrels and iron-railed front with intersecting arches. Central round-arched doorway with key block and impost, with glazed door. Steps and terraced garden area at front have good contemporary railings with pineapple finials and turned newels."

Take a look at Michael's website and see if you agree with my nomination for favourite house. Or write in to HIP if you have another candidate! exmouthhousehastings.co.uk

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Steven Short with friend

They May not Mean to, but They do

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Short Stories about Mothers and Fathers isn't at all what you would expect from the title. I expected condensed, pointed fiction but instead was surprised with two dozen often painfully honest recollections, about (or by) fathers and mothers. This is a collaborative project, in which the editor and writer Steven Short brings together the experienc-

es of 'new and emerging writers'. There's much in here that will resonate with most readers: some searing quotations ('I always thought your happiness was my responsibility', says one woman of her mother) resonated quite uncomfortably. More viscerally, someone else talks of the smell of facepowder on her mother's cheek. There's an account of a mother's regret that her son, once so totally dependent on her, is now twenty-one with a beard, making his own decisions and his own mistakes. As a mother it can be hard to let go, hard not to remember the trusting hand in yours, the lovely bedtimes with just one more story.

There are accounts of parents' degeneration into illness or dementia; there are others of maternal and paternal cruelty; there are yet others of unresolved yearning for one who is lost. Taken as a group, I would say that the recollections of mothers are – what? More personal, perhaps, or more about the authors' emotions, than the stories of the fathers and their activities. One piece is indeed about how it feels *not* to be a mother.

This is Steven Short's fifth themed collection. He started the imprint a long while ago when his own mother was ill with dementia. There are 'short stories' in the series on Mother, Madness, Animals, and Fathers, and this is a selection with some updates and new pieces. Each collection has different contributors, selected from a group who responded to Short's callout on social media.

A small and very readable publication, the book is suitable as a gift for anyone you think might be interested (prospective parents, partners, maybe friends you know well), and despite some desperately sad content it is largely upbeat and positive.

Short Stories about Mothers & Fathers is available on Etsy, £6.50 including p&p.



Rowdy SS immersed

The Art That Will Not Fit

EBM HUMPHREYS

Home Live Art are celebrating their twenty-fifth birthday this year, so there was cake all round at an auspiciously thirteenth *Salty* cabaret last Thursday at the White Rock Theatre. HLA are the very people that once trained me to write non-colonising reviews: notice that the word 'review' is a slippery invitation to 'know best'.

But how can we know whether our gaze, our opinion, is objective and fair, or whether someone's skin colour, body shape or sexuality is unduly influencing our experience of their art? Well, we probably can't. So, instead, we can observe ourselves watching the show – especially a show like this, where what's fascinating is the array of

reactions on British faces to a roaming performer in a dangerous costume. This is who you can depend on HLA to book.

Not every act left the stage. Take the Pink Suits, a *Salty* staple, brilliant dancers deeply beloved by director Katy Baird, who shone, in this cabaret setting, with their tight and sexy offerings, that included a physics-defying version of Dirty Dancing's iconic routine. Local debutante Victoria Oldman (also active in the Queer History collective) took to the stage without fright for a comedy *Ghostbusters* routine – and together with Rowdy SS's full-frontal sensory immersion, and Nene Camara's visceral critique of mainstream body standards (protective eyewear provided), defied expectations of queer, drag or cabaret performances to be sexualised.

Local DJ Sarah Buller kept the

thumping tunes coming all night, and I can own my bias in being most in love with Ginny Lemon, to whom I owe the censorable earworm 'balls-deep in [a national treasure]'. Another superb dancer, Azara Meghie, brought the queer joy in a Grace Jones homage. Albeit billed as a 'queer drag show' at the box office, *Salty* offers queer artists a freedom to evolve, because of HLA's overtly risk-taking ethos. Literally anything goes, as long as the venue doesn't get into trouble with the law (which has happened).

The clue is in the name. 'Live Art' isn't a catchy title, it's an art form. Troublemaking on the fringes of performance art, live-art is home to the art that will not fit. Much as the artists at this auspicious thirteenth *Salty* are professionals: there is a distinct invitation into the chaotic and uncharted. Live art favours innovative, unpredictable and site-specific cultural experiences – it can't be well-defined because it ignores parameters. But it is very much alive.

You can sign up for HLA's newsletter at homeliveart.com.

Agatha! A Continuing Inspiration

VICTORIA KINGHAM at the Stables Gallery

As far as one can tell, Agatha Christie never lived here. Among other exotic locations, she lived variously in Devon, Oxfordshire, Cheshire, Egypt, and the Canary Islands, and famously once disappeared and was discovered two weeks later at

a spa in Harrogate – a 'mystery' unsolved to this day.

If Hastings was not her chosen residence, she immortalised the name. Her Captain Hastings appeared in only eight of her thirty-three books, but Hugh Fraser's depiction on the TV mysteries which endlessly circulate the Freeview channels, as the brave, loyal, credulous, good-natured but slightly stupid friend of the great Poirot, is the stuff of legend.

The Stables exhibition called for



paintings inspired by Christie and her

work. It's fun and interesting, and showcases new work by a number of talented artists, among them Tessa Thonett and Yvonne Rees, works pictured here. There are several of *The Uninvited Guest*, possibly because that's the latest play to be

shown at The Stables. There are a number of portraits of Christie, young and old, and occasional ones inspired by book titles, but (a little disappointingly, given the obvious name association) none have anything to do with Captain Hastings.

The Stables continues to show a creditable and tasteful selection of local art works. I'm always delighted to visit the small gallery, and there is always a welcome and a conversation. The exhibition continues until 21 December; well worth a visit.



← Yvonne Rees, *Nemesis*, Collage ↑ Tessa Thonett, *Young Agatha*

A Sense of Place

GARETH STEVENS talks to painter James MacKinnon

At times, the best visual artists I get to know are not always especially articulate about what they are trying to express in their work. So it is with James MacKinnon. His paintings are not illustrations of contrived pre-conceived art theories; rather they beautifully evoke a deeply held connection with urban landscape and vernacular architecture that many of us share, but may be unaware of. I sometimes get suspicious of those who are so adept at explaining their work in words. After all, if James wanted to do that, then he may as well write poetry. Indeed the way in which James'

paintings reveal the inherent beauty and wonder of our most prosaic surroundings is deeply poetic.

In conversation, James' passion is palpable, and it is clear that his paintings are like love letters to the everyday scenes that are oftentimes overlooked, whether they be in the East End of London or in St Leonards.

"I moved to St Leonards a decade ago, having lived and painted in Hackney for many years," James tells me. "The landscape of the East End with its juxtaposition of canals, open spaces, tower blocks and railway lines had been my constant pre-occupation, yet I looked forward to discovering new visual delights in an environment I was yet to explore."

He goes on to explain that it is "the faded grandeur of the town, often bathed in a vivid coastal light" that he was previously unaccustomed to, that continually inspires him here.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

his craft. His prowess when using colour is impressive. Subtle shifts in earth tones and hues ... painstakingly mixed in oils and applied, bring such unmistakable authenticity to his paintings.

A more persuasive use of brighter colours has accompanied James to his relatively new seaside town. It is not unusual to see him painting in the street directly responding to whatever 'place' had most recently caught his eye. "I started painting on the London Road in St Leonards, focusing on the architectural vista that leads down towards the sea. The striking mural of the Love Café is prominently featured. The response locally was amazing, and commissions started flowing." The 'Love Café' painting clearly demonstrates his love of coastal light, his ability to construct less obvious compositional structure and his exquisite

Whether James is painting a snug bar, a deserted London underground tunnel or an intersection of a road bridge with a canal, it is his ability to conjure magic from the mundane which is so arresting. That is not to take anything away from

nently featured. The response locally was amazing, and commissions started flowing." The 'Love Café' painting clearly demonstrates his love of coastal light, his ability to construct less obvious compositional structure and his exquisite

attention to underlying perspective. Recently 'Bow Arts' decided to form an exhibition exploring the past and present of east London, bringing together the historical paintings of the East London Group with a number of their 21st century contemporaries.

Exploring the artists' shared passion for immortalising the streets and scenes of East London, the show explores this theme across time. The historic East London Group began with evening painting classes in Bethnal Green in the interwar years. Made up of mostly working-class men and women, the group simply painted what surrounded them – the East End. The group became enormously successful despite the class prejudices of the time.

James tells me that to be involved in the *In the Footsteps of the East London Group* exhibition is a great honour and only continues his resolve to keep producing East London-based work. The show is hosted by the Nunnery Gallery in Bow until 22 December. That James has a painting reproduced on the cover of the sumptuously produced exhibition catalogue, speaks volumes about the regard in which his work is held.

jamesmackinnonfineart.com

Hastings Contemporary Director Leaves for Dorset



VICTORIA KINGHAM

The Director of Hastings Contemporary is leaving to take up the post of Chief Executive Officer at The Sherborne in Dorset.

Liz Gilmore was the founding Director of what was, fourteen years ago, the Jerwood Gallery. It later became Hastings Contemporary, an independent, self-governing charity, and she has played a key role in its development, her careful curation emphasising the talents of the underrepresented in general and women in particular. Certainly the last few exhibitions have not

only been artistically innovative, but also thought-provoking and educational, partly due to their definite thematic interest.

She has acquired a reputation for innovation, and I wondered how that would work in her new role at The Sherborne in Dorset. The gallery, a former dilapidated stately home, has only recently been restored to its former glory by Michael Cannon and aims to be a 'landmark new destination for the Arts'. It is a world away from Hastings, in both ambience and actual distance. But she feels that she has helped steer the Contemporary to stand on its own and given it a clear direction during that time, and that after

fourteen years, this is the time for someone else to take over. "It was really a confluence of reasons, and the excitement of another startup project, one sufficiently different to give me a stimulus for the next phase," she tells me. "I grew up in the South West," she goes on, "so I know the area well and I have friends and family there." As CEO (which, she modestly tells me, is pretty much the same as Director but under a different title), she will have responsibility for a much broader and more complex sphere of activity. The Sherborne combines exhibition spaces, beautiful gardens, film shows, live theatre, public workshops, and a first-class restaurant and bar, the continued development of all of which she will oversee. She is looking forward to the challenge.

She is due to take up the new position in March next year.



Meanwhile Hastings Contemporary is still running *Immortal Apples, Eternal Eggs* until the end of March.

Other pre-Christmas activities include a sold-out after-school art class, adult life drawing classes, and a 'Sip and Draw' evening. See hastingscontemporary.org/events/life-drawing-3 for more details.

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Individuality, Found Objects, and Fish

DAVE YOUNG

St Leonards artist, Helen D. Moore - showing at the Crown in All Saints Street throughout January - is a printmaker who specialises in bird and other animal cartoons. She initially trained as a jewellery maker; a fact not immediately obvious from her packed studio where everything from a printing press to part-completed art in various media reflects a



lifetime's acquisition of diverse creative skills.

After an art degree at Sheffield Polytechnic, graduating during the 1980s economic recession, Helen took on part-time 'real' jobs to support her art. In 1993 she attended a print-making course at Sheffield art gallery and "after two hours knew something had changed in my life...

printmaking is exquisite." Being already experienced in silversmithing, the process of etching metal plates to produce prints wasn't a big stretch, and Helen already had many of the necessary tools. "I don't think people know how much work goes into an etching," she says, albeit this is only part of the slow, labour-intensive process of creating a print.

Helen subsequently exhibited in various galleries around the UK,

however technological innovation - giclee printing and computer design - meant that competing with cheaper production methods became increasingly difficult, although she believes people are coming back to an appreciation of hand-crafted prints.

INDIVIDUALITY

Helen prefers to produce individual works and doesn't like the constraint of numbered editions, resisting what she terms "conformified" art to make mixed media paintings and sculptures, along with stitched and stencilled pictures.

As an artist Helen follows her moods and fascinations. Working with children to produce art, and "being a Pisces" led her to draw fish. These somehow developed eyes and feet and morphed into birds; her prints are determinedly not representational.

Continually attending classes and summer schools and always creat-

ing, Helen has segued into quilting, knitting and crochet; studying textiles, pattern and texture - a continuing theme throughout her career.

Always fascinated by boats and the coast - latterly moving to Hastings where she'd previously holidayed - Helen's work often incorporates found objects. Sometimes bird prints are cut out and placed into painted backgrounds or repurposed old art, "I felt they needed to be part of a larger picture." Other works employ beads and objects from childhood, such as beautiful light-reflecting, mother-of-pearl buttons that, "deserved to be seen"; discovered when emptying her mother's house and "given a new life."



Helen's exhibition is at The Crown from 3-31 January 2025 [instagram.com/helendmoore444](https://www.instagram.com/helendmoore444) or email helendmoore444@hotmail.com

Hastings Theatre Project UK Premiere



Tom Messner and Sharon Hayes, who star in the whole DFL series

CHARLOTTE TINGLEY

Over the course of the next twelve months, Hastings will host a theatrical event like none seen before. A girl-meets-boy romcom interrogat-

ing contemporary themes, think *One Day-on-Sea*, Notting Hill on the West Hill.

Throughout the year, Hastings Theatre Project will present *DFL* - six short scenes set during key moments in the town's calendar in locations across the borough. This play is sup-

ported by public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, and will be presented on a 'Pay What You Decide' basis. This means that you can choose from different price points that suit you to watch an exciting piece of new theatre. All ticket income goes back into helping us create and develop the show throughout the next year and to support local artists and creatives.

ABOUT HASTINGS THEATRE PROJECT

Hastings Theatre Project is a brand-new theatre organisation based in Hastings, East Sussex. We exist to champion and progress theatre made by, for, and with the people of our town. At the moment, we are a very small team (just Dan and Poppy) but we are already working with brilliant collaborators and hope to grow long into the future.

Hastings is a creative town with a large number of visual art and music events, though theatre has often been underrepresented. There are numerous theatre and screen creatives living in the area, but they are often forced to travel elsewhere (London primarily) to make work. We want to challenge the London-centric focus by supporting dramatic artists to make work locally.

Contact Stage Manager Charlotte Tingley on Charlotte.ting@live.co.uk *DFL* Premiere details at hastingstheatreproject.org

St Leonards Concerts Social and Fundraiser

MAX BAILLIE

On Monday 9 December I look forward to gathering the concert-going community at beautiful Crown House on the seafront. Whether or not you have been to lots of the concerts (and I know so many of you have!) or just one or two, this is a chance to have a chat over a drink and to celebrate what we have enjoyed together so far. I'm also excited to be announcing some of next year's programmes, along with longer term plans for St Leonards Concerts. I will play a little something for the gathering, but this is strictly speaking not a concert, but a social event, and also a fundraiser towards 2025.



This event takes place on Monday 9 December 7pm Crown House 57 Marina TN38 0BE

Hastings Girls Choir – Information Needed

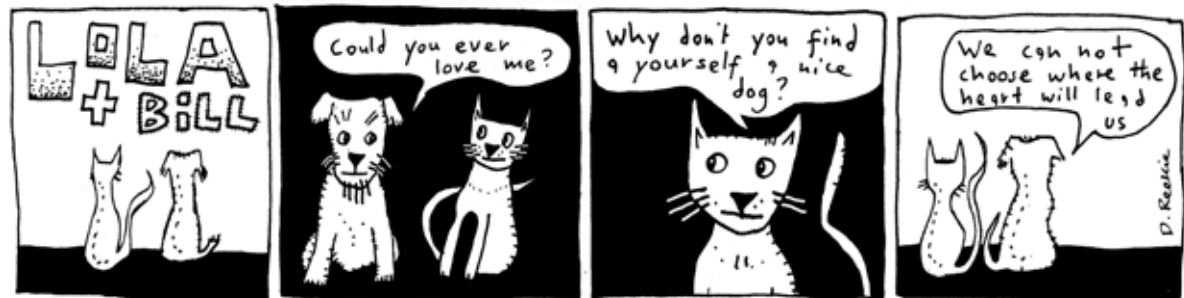
ANDREW HEAVENS

Hi, I am a writer and historian trying to get some information on the Hastings Girls Choir. It made some classic recordings with jazz musician Shake Keane some time in the late 1960s, maybe into 1970. That made a very interesting combination. I am trying to find out how they got together and what else they may have recorded.

But there doesn't seem to be much information online.

They appeared on a couple of recordings: the album *Rising Stars At Evening Time*, and single *The Nursery Blues/Ruanda* by The Shake Keane Fivetet.

I would be very grateful if anyone who knows about the choir and its history could get in touch at andrew.heavens@gmail.com. It would be great to hear more.



HIP BOOK REVIEW

Bodichon

By Mary Upton
Tradewinds Publishing, 2024,
rrp £9.99
REVIEW BY PETE DONOHUE

A novel featuring a protagonist born into British colonial landed society a decade before Victoria takes the throne, is far from my usual genre of choice. Discovering it is based on the extraordinary and societally impactful life of a real person, however, interested me more. Although I knew little of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon – campaigner for women’s rights, professional artist, educational philanthropist and adventurous traveller – it did not take many pages for me to become fully invested in her compelling journey.

Mary Upton has published three previous novels, one of historical fiction and two of Sci Fi. In *Bodichon* she writes in first person narrative, allowing her to express some of the thoughts, feelings and emotions she imagines Barbara goes through in the course of her many achievements. This brings an extra layer of colour to the story and encourages readers to get behind the character in a way a traditional biography may not. The author has clearly researched her subject well and a helpful family tree at the book’s opening explains the complex relationships of the familial characters. I also like the short chapter lengths, which keeps the pace going whilst also offering the reader a chance to easily pause and reflect. Upton’s earlier career was in mental health and, following extensive world travel, she is now settled in St Leonards.

HASTINGS, ROBERTSBRIDGE AND BEYOND
The *Bodichon* story is very much a local Hastings one too, with Barbara having been born in Whatlington, spending her formative years living in Pelham Crescent, and her later years at ‘Scalands’, a cottage on the



edge of her father’s estate near Robertsbridge, which she extended into a night school to teach literacy to manual workers from Hastings and its surrounds. In between, there are long trips to East Coast America, French colonial Algiers, excursions in Europe and time spent in London. The movement between different locales captures the enthusiasm and energy of Bodichon’s life, although travel was slow then, which kept me rivetted.

Born into privileged Victorian society, Barbara’s family life was unconventional in many ways, not least because her eccentric father, a Whig politician, reformist and Unitarian, refused to marry, despite fathering a further four children with her mother before she died from consumption aged just thirty-two. A theme of non-conformity continues throughout the book, and indeed Barbara’s life, as she constantly challenges societal and church conventions, the class system, the arts and education establishments, and most passionately the denied rights of women.

Introducing her novel, Upton quotes directly from, Barbara Leigh

Smith: ‘I am one of the cracked people of the world, and I like to herd with the cracked, such as queer Americans, Democrats, Socialists, artists, poor devils or angels; and am never happy in genteel English family life.’ Barbara certainly fulfilled this, mixing from a young age with politicians, the liberal intelligentsia, artists including Turner, Holman Hunt, Rossetti and Lizzie Siddal; and in adulthood the educator and feminist Emily Davies, as well as author George Eliot (Marian Evans).

With teenage years behind her, Barbara is inspired by older women to join anti-slavery and women’s rights campaigns, as well as developing an interest in education. Pulled between art and politics, she determines to study painting, shunning any suggestions that women cannot become professional artists. Accepted by Bedford College in Bloomsbury with support from its feminist founder, Barbara declares: ‘It makes me want to laugh and shout from the top of Fairlight. “We are here, we are not going to remain silent.”’ And Barbara Leigh Smith remains anything but silent, fielding opposition from society and certain wings of her family, along with devoting compassionate energy to friends, loved ones and others in need, to make significant impacts in the fields of art, education and feminist politics.

Barbara’s marriage to Dr Eugène Bodichon reinforces the unconventional nature of her life’s trajectory. Her French husband of noble birth was a charismatic older man who, finding himself stifled by the conventions of his native country, chose to live in Algiers (where they first met) and developed a local medical

practice. Often dressed in Arab clothes, he also practised naturism, herbalism and notably researched and popularised the medicinal benefits of eucalyptus. Unusually for the time, it was a marriage of equals, with both giving each other the space to achieve their own ambitions whilst remaining devoted to each other.

AN ILLUMINATING ACCOUNT OF AN EXCEPTIONAL WOMAN
All the while Barbara is campaigning for equality for women in education and work, writing pamphlets and papers, organising debate. Her paintings are beginning to sell, and she petitions the Royal Academy who continue to prohibit women from crossing its portals. She campaigns for women’s rights to own property and, along with Emily Davies, sets up Girton, the first women’s college in Cambridge, overcoming intense opposition from all quarters of the Victorian status quo. There was even tension between Barbara’s more rebellious approach and that of her more cautious suffragist ally, Davies, who believed only unmarried women and widows should gain the vote. An interesting fact I

learnt from this book was that George Eliot donated the profits from *Middlemarch* to the construction of Girton.

Mary Upton’s novel gives an illuminating account of an exceptional woman and her numerous successes as she battles adversity throughout her, albeit privileged, life, including serious illness during her later years. There are insights too into the trials and tribulations of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon’s friends and family – her lifelong best friend Bessie, the young woman Hertha whom she mentors and treats as the child she never had, her husband, and her brother Ben, an Arctic explorer – making *Bodichon* a great all round read. As we move into winter and the festive season, a time of giving, what better than a book about someone who not only achieved success as a professional artist but also devoted her life to helping the less privileged in our society. I found it uplifting and am sure you will.

Bodichon is available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road, Hastings TN34 1RE, as well as The Hastings Bookshop, The Bookkeeper and Hare & Hawthorn. Please support our local independent bookshops!

CHRISTMAS FAIR



Christmas Market
Thursday 12th December
12-6pm
4th floor art

Artwork by Amy Merto, Level 3 Year 1, Art & Design. School of Art and Design East Sussex College Hastings

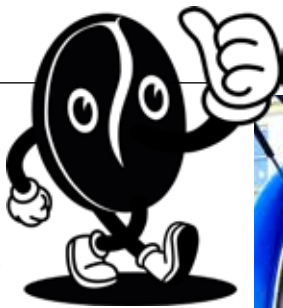
CROSSWORD CORNER

- Across**
- 1. One sampling unusual treats (6)
 - 3. Quickly switch onto PR (6)
 - 4. Old priest gets eleven r for magic potion (6)
- Down**
- 1. Stop please or tumble within (6)
 - 2. Diligence and severity (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List

1					2
3					
4					

The Secret Barista stops at Café La Mer



In Hastings Town Centre, operating from an elegantly appointed trailer, stands Café La Mer. Marc Wioland is the skilled barista producing some excellent artisan coffee from this prominent position.

Marc had an unusual route to becoming a barista. He used to be a prison officer and was involved in a rehabilitation scheme to train inmates who were up for release in the skills of making coffee. The coffee company sponsoring the scheme trained Marc in the secrets of the barista, and he trained the inmates. In his words: “Redemption and rehabilitation”.

Why the name Café La Mer or Café the Sea? Simple: Marc is part French. He says: “Café La Mer was created in memory of my dad, who passed three years ago whilst the classic French song *La Mer* was



PHOTOS: THE SECRET BARISTA

playing.” Subsequently, Marc came down to Hastings from Aylesbury and converted an existing van which was operating as a Greek street food outlet as well as taking on the lease for the space it inhabited – right in the centre of town.

He took the trailer to a workshop and with specialist mechanics, restored, painted it and adapted it for coffee making.

The vivid blue and white design with elegant typography evokes cafés in the resorts of the South of France with a touch of 50’s modern-

ism. I am reminded of the visual landscape of Monsieur Hulot’s Holiday, a stylish, surreal and comedic silent film made in 1953. It was directed by and starred Jacques Tati as the bumbling M. Hulot who wanders about a French seaside resort and, slightly confused by the modern world, inadvertently causes havoc.

It was an inspiration for Rowan Atkinson’s Mr. Bean films, and perhaps an inspiration for me ‘Beanie’ - the Secret Barista. I must admit, recently I have been bumbling around this seaside resort in my

search for ‘Coffee Nirvana’.

Marc has built up an impressive following of devoted regulars who have turned their backs on the chain coffee shops that circle his van. He has brought us a little flavour of French holiday culture and placed it in the middle of our seaside town. When the weather allows, it’s the perfect place to stop by for an aromatic espresso and locally baked pastries (delicious croissants of course) and a chat on your way to the beach.

How very continental.

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Confidence Ebbs at the Pilot Field

23 November:
Hendon 9,
Hastings Utd 0

26 November:
Hastings Utd 1,
Carshalton Athletic 1

30 November:
Hastings Utd 0,
Dartford 3

HUGH SULLIVAN

November was a confidence-sapping month for Hastings United. Having ditched manager Danny Bloor on 27 October, they won their first game in the aftermath against Whitehawk, but have lost four and drawn one of their five Isthmian League matches since, dropping into the relegation zone. Caretaker manager Sean Ray has seen his side score just twice and concede 16 goals in the process.

At Hendon on 23 November the wheels came off. The ‘U’s conceded three goals in the first 20 minutes, and were four down at halftime. Curiously, Ray replaced rookie defender Tyrone Mlotshwa with a

forward, Will Harley, at that point, but used none of the other substitutes on the bench, which included regular players Leo Young, Tommie Fagg and Jack Dixon. The North London side netted five more goals in the second half.

“I can’t explain that performance”, said Ray afterwards, “probably the most humiliating – whether that’s kids’ football, adult football, parks football – that I’ve ever been involved in.

“We just didn’t look like we could, or wanted to, defend as a group. It was a half-hearted effort. They didn’t follow anything that we asked for.”

He apologised “on behalf of all the players” to the supporters who had made the long journey and called his squad in for an extra training session the following Monday in advance of a Tuesday evening home game against Carshalton.

With Young, Fagg and Dixon all restored to the starting line-up and Harley making his full debut, the Hastings team responded with a better display. Harley scored after ten minutes and, though an equaliser was conceded from a penalty

shortly before halftime, the ‘U’s had the better of the second half without forcing a winner. “They’ve shown they care, they’ve shown they can do it, and can get the basics right”, Ray declared.

Last Saturday, on a mild grey afternoon at the Pilot Field, a crowd of over 1,400 (enhanced by a boisterous contingent from north Kent) saw them test their new resolve on visitors Dartford but were found wanting. While never capitulating, the ‘U’s frankly struggled against a side that were quicker and more incisive. A needless penalty was conceded and netted past Louis Rogers after 15 minutes and, from then on, most of the goalmouth action took place at the Hastings end.

At halftime Ray kept his team back in the dressing room for the maximum time allowed, and at the re-start they played for a time with increased urgency and determination to get forward. George Walker scampered down the right wing, and Freddie Legg made some inroads down the left; Adam Lovatt was always combative in midfield. But up front neither Harley (just turned 18) nor Davide Rodari were quick or mobile enough to profit from the half-chances offered. At the other end, Dartford eventually doubled their goal tally when a move down the right allowed a midfielder time and space to drive a shot in from the edge of the area, and a third goal came in added time with the ‘U’s defence spread-eagled.

Where do they go from here? Appointment of a new manager must be the priority: it doesn’t seem that Sean Ray wants the job – or has time for it - on a permanent basis. But until someone else is found, he has to keep looking for a spark to rekindle the players’ confidence.

Next up are three away trips in a row - to Chichester tomorrow (Saturday), Horsham next Wednesday, and Billericay on 14 December – before fellow strugglers Bowers & Pitsea come to the Pilot Field on 21 December.

RUGBY

No Cup Run for H&B

30 November:
Uckfield 33,
Hastings & Bexhill 5

PETER KNIGHT

Hastings and Bexhill 1st XV travelled to Uckfield for this first round tie of the Sussex Shield. They were thoroughly beaten by a strong Sussex 1 side, who scored four good tries in the first half, three of which were converted. H&B made only three visits into the opposition half during the whole of this first session.

The loss of Wes Lorman after only five minutes play did not help the Hastings cause; it did, however.



Quin McManus, now returned from New Zealand

give coach Bruce Steadman the opportunity to bring Quin McManus back into the fold after his seven-month absence in New Zealand. He immediately settled to his task.

The second half was less one-sided, and in the 65th minute Frazer McManus crossed the line to give H&B a consolation try. The game was as good as over when Uckfield produced another well-executed move to score a final converted try.

Hastings tackled well and scrummaged hard, but truthfully they were no match for a well-coached and talented squad who are currently top of Sussex Division 1. The H&B man of the match was hooker Josh Clarke, who played well throughout the game.

H&B return to Kent League action next week at home to Whitstable with a 2pm kick off.

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ISTHMIAN PREMIER LEAGUE (BOTTOM SIX) AS AT 1 DECEMBER

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
17	Cheshunt	16	4	4	8	24	26	-2	16
18	Cray Wanderers	17	4	4	9	17	23	-6	16
19	Hastings Utd	17	4	4	9	16	35	-19	16
20	Whitehawk	18	4	3	11	12	33	-21	15
21	Bowers & Pitsea	17	4	1	12	15	30	-15	13
22	Bognor Regis	17	3	3	11	20	42	-22	12

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