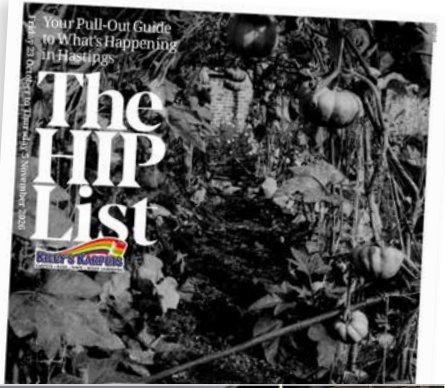


Inside:
Your Pull Out
Guide to What
is Happening
in and Around
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Wacky Dog Show

6 →

RNLI Future



8 →

Lots Vacant

Council Stalls on Auction Powers to Re-Let Town Centre Units

HUGH SULLIVAN

Earlier this year, Rother District Council commissioned an audit of vacant commercial premises in Bexhill town centre. Of 439 units, 384 were found to be occupied, 55 vacant – an overall percentage of 12.5%, rising to more than 22% in London Road.

The audit was undertaken by Eastbourne’s Business Improve-

ment District (BID) with a funding contribution from government as a step towards Rother’s assumption of High Street Rental Auction powers (HSRAs) over a number of Bexhill streets.

Enacted by Rishi Sunak’s Conservative government in 2023 and brought into effect in December 2024, these powers give local authorities the opportunity to intervene where shops, offices and hospitality premises have lain persistently vacant. In short, where a

3 →



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Looking vacant: Both Hastings and Rother councils suffer the blight of empty buildings in public spaces. Complex government rules, forthcoming (or not- there's a legal challenge) local authority changes, and the size of many of the units make this a difficult issue to resolve, and meanwhile they fall into disrepair.

Also in the News section, locally and nationally, just as they attain office, splits appear in the Green Party, a factional and fast-moving story.

Less convolutedly, the Community pages review the second Wacky Dog show at the Pumphouse and host a useful Q&A on the pros and cons of home plug-in solar panels.

Elsewhere, HIP offers a Halloween-adjacent short story as well as our usual Listings pages, previews and reviews in Spotlight and football and rugby reports in Sport.

In Arts, we review Hastings Philharmonic's 10th anniversary celebration at the White Rock Theatre, take an in-depth look at 'Cafe Franglais' at The Stables, and consider if AI can aid creative writing (probably not).

The Literature page has a timely review of a new book on the fight for housing renters' rights and a very welcome poem from local legend Henry Normal.

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News



Southern Water Drop-In

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

Southern Water will host a “Your Water Matters” drop-in event at the Stade Hall on Wednesday 4 November, giving residents a chance to ask questions and learn about “the work, improvements and investments” being made in Hastings and the surrounding area. The Stade Hall event will run from 1:30 to 6:00pm and residents can drop in at any time during those hours.

The event will give the privatised water company the opportunity to point to its record investment to improve the resilience of the network, with over £8 million spent on refurbishing a sewage

transfer pipe through Bulverhythe and more than £4 million in pumping station upgrades and sewer lining work to address infiltration and misconnections.

Southern Water’s recent operational history in the town reads as a catalogue of failure, however, and the company will have to work hard to convince residents that the drop-in is little more than a PR exercise. The string of failures includes the flooding of the town centre, outages that led people to fear they would have no water last Christmas, and a major water outage in May 2024, which left 30,000 people without running water for more than five days – when bottled water was promised but not delivered, water stations were insufficient, and traffic gridlocked across the town. The water outage was so bad that staff at the White Rock Hotel were even forced to fill buckets from the sea to flush toilets.

Sewage pollution has also been a persistent problem. Southern Water has discharged raw sewage into the sea off Hastings and St Leonards on multiple occasions, including a release from the Pelham overflow in August this year after 60 days of near drought conditions , and last November millions of plastic bio-beads were released into the sea from the company’s Eastbourne Wastewater Treatment Works after a screening filter failed during heavy rainfall.

Southern Water insists that it is listening to local concerns. The company will hope that direct engagement with residents will help them to feel more positive about their efforts to improve the infrastructure and water quality across the town.

For a community that has endured dry taps, flooded streets and sewage on beaches, however, it is likely to take more than a drop-in to flush away local scepticism.

HASTINGS TIDES

DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES				SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 23 OCT	L 4:05	H 9:36	L 16:30	H 21:58	7:34	17:49	
SAT 24 OCT	L 4:54	H 10:12	L 17:16	H 22:33	7:35	17:47	
CLOCKS GO BACK BST>GMT							
SUN 25 OCT	L 4:36	H 9:48	L 16:57	H 22:09	6:37	16:45	
MON 26 OCT	L 5:17	H 10:25	L 17:37	H 22:47	6:39	16:43	FULL
TUES 27 OCT	L 5:55	H 11:05	L 18:16	H 23:28	6:41	16:42	
WEDS 28 OCT	L 6:33	H 11:47	L 18:54		6:42		
THURS 29 OCT	H 0:10	L 7:11	H 12:32	L 19:34	6:44	16:38	
FRI 30 OCT	H 0:55	L 7:52	H 13:19	L 20:16	6:46	16:36	
SAT 31 OCT	H 1:45	L 8:38	H 14:15	L 21:06	6:47	16:34	
SUN 1 NOV	H 2:45	L 9:35	H 15:28	L 22:11	6:49	16:32	THIRD
MON 2 NOV	H 4:06	L 10:50	H 16:55	L 23:33	6:51	16:31	
TUES 3 NOV	H 5:30	L 12:15	H 18:15		6:53	16:29	
WEDS 4 NOV	L 0:58	H 6:45	L 13:37	H 19:29	6:54	16:27	
THURS 5 NOV	L 2:15	H 7:53	L 14:48	H 20:33	6:56	16:26	

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Marina Pavilion Bidders Seek Further Works

The future of the Marina Pavilion (formerly the Azur) on St Leonards seafront remains clouded as potential bidders seek further works by regeneration company Sea Change Sussex, who have a 35-year head lease of the property. Sea Change in turn continue to hold Hastings Borough Council, who are the freeholders, accountable for underlying structural and services defects.

The Pavilion has been empty and unused since the lease of the former tenants, Azur Events Limited, was terminated in January 2024.

Serious problems with both drainage and electrical services to the property were said to have been resolved, with a new power supply eventually installed and connected by UK Power Networks at the beginning of this year. Since then, Sea Change have undertaken a range of what they called “essential repairs”, including electrical safety works, external cleaning, graffiti removal and other minor works needed to put the property back on the market.

Engaging both specialist national agents Fleurets and Hastings-based agency Dyer and Hobbs, Sea Change have gone on to advertise the property, seeking bidders either for a fresh ten-year sub-lease or alternatively a transfer of the head lease for the remainder of its term.

In July the company’s Development Director Andrew Frost said that “With the power and drainage problems finally behind us ... there’s a great deal of interest in the facility from operators as well as members of the community who’ve enjoyed

using it in recent years.”

By August, Sea Change were reporting that several potential bidders had emerged and were carrying out repeat viewings with their advisors. The company set a response deadline of 23 September for interested parties to submit their proposals, and its spokesperson confirmed last week that “several well-considered submissions” have been received.

However, all proposals are reported to be “conditional on works being carried out to the property, and on consent both to the letting and to potentially required works from Hastings Borough Council”.

The extent of works varies between different bidders, and Sea Change will be reviewing the proposals with their own building surveyors. However, their spokesperson admitted that this is occasioning further delays. “Unfortunately, despite previous discussions, Hastings Borough Council has served notice upon us demanding the property be refurbished within six months in a manner that includes the completion of works not due until the lease ends.”

Ongoing issues of vandalism, further electrical problems and flooding from overflowing drains connected to the adjoining public toilets are also reported.

Sea Change say they are now seeking discussion with the council “to attempt to get back to a more reasonable, measured approach to works ... We hope we can agree a way forward that will accelerate the reopening of the premises.”

PHOTOS: HUGH SULLIVAN



Empty premises in Robertson Street

1 ← property within a designated area has remained unoccupied for at least a year, or for a cumulative 366 days over two years, landlords can be required to bring it up to minimum standard and forced to offer it for let at an open market price determined by auction.

Having established the confines of the given area and obtained information of non-occupation so as to create a vacancy register, the local authority can then engage with the owners of vacant premises. And these owners can be given notice of potential action including the undertaking of formal auction procedures in the event that the premises remain unlet.

Last month the Rother cabinet, armed with the audit statistics, approved a designation area covering most of the town centre. It is currently consulting with the local community, as the legislation requires them to do, before addressing individual properties and their owners.

What about Hastings? Long term empty premises such as the former Peacocks store in Queens Road, the Italian Way restaurant and Argos shop in Castle Street, Kaspas and (parts of) Debenhams in Robertson Street are evidence of similar problems here.

In April this year deputy leader of Hastings Borough Council (HBC), Julia Hilton, stated that the council would begin work towards exercising HSRA powers in Hastings town centre, hoping to be funded in part or whole from the government's just-announced High Streets Innovation Partnerships initiative. And at the beginning of June Steve Reed, the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, launched a £10 million fund specifically to encourage more councils to use HSRA powers.

But it does not seem that HBC has applied for a share. Asked last week whether any progress had been made, an HBC spokesperson said that a report on prospective HSRA action was being drawn up for councillors to discuss in cabinet, although conceding that there was no timeline for this, stating only: "it's looking like early 2027".

can pass straight to the new authority, and Hastings could do the same, he says, making an immediate up-to-date count of what's empty in the town, where, and for how long. His company, Love Hastings Ltd would be keen to do it. However, the adoption of HSRA powers should be one of several tools in a deliberate plan for the town centre, "not just a way of filling an empty unit with whatever turns up".

NATIONAL ROLL-OUT

The proportion of shops, offices and hospitality premises in Hastings and Bexhill town centres that are currently vacant is hardly unique.

According to the Local Data Company, which conducts regular surveys of retail units across the country, vacancies in British high streets hover on average between 13% and 17%.

Moreover, it seems that only a small proportion of the roughly 300 councils in England eligible to use the powers have in fact taken any steps to exercise them. The government has claimed that, across the country, more than 60 properties have been brought back into occupation as a result of exercising HSRA powers – all, it seems, by landlords acting under threat of notices rather than from auctions. But only one single authority, Broxtowe in Nottinghamshire, has reached the stage of closing bids on its first full auction, after £200,000 of government money was contributed to refurbish the building at issue (a former pub).

So are HSRA powers worth exercising? The question has been hotly debated nationally, with some commentators arguing that it makes no commercial sense for landlords to leave their properties vacant. However, it's evident that they do, whether from unrealistic financial calculation or lack of willingness to invest, with consequential blight upon their neighbours. HBC have acknowledged the problem and the potential armoury at their disposal. So when will they act?

AUCTION PROCESS

John Bownas, of Hastings BID, points out that before a council can exercise any HSRA powers, it needs to gather an evidence base, approve a designated area, and undertake a 28-day community consultation. Then for each property it needs proof of a year's vacancy, a notice period of 10 to 12 weeks, followed by a 12-week auction process. On this basis HBC are running a year or more behind Rother, with no commencement of powers likely to be effective in Hastings until the latter end of 2027 at earliest.

The main factor in HBC's tardy behaviour may stem, Mr Bownas suggests, from local government reorganisation. "In July the government confirmed East Sussex will become a single unitary council, so HBC is counting down to its own abolition. Rother's September report noted that none of the other East Sussex district and borough councils had plans to adopt HSRA. I can see why a council would hesitate to start a multi-year enforcement programme it won't be around to finish."

But Mr Bownas doesn't think that's a good enough reason to wait. Rother is building its evidence so it



Former Peacocks store in Queens Road - empty since March 2020

Transport Secretary to 'Look Into' Ashford Rail Come-Back

BBC South-East reported last week that Prime Minister Andy Burnham gave a boost to the return of international trains to Ashford.

In a debate in Parliament on international affairs Helena Doolimore, MP for Hastings and Rye, told him that reopening the international terminal there "would boost our economy by £2.7 billion and bring half a million more visitors to Sussex and Kent every year... It is a no-brainer, so will the Prime Minister give me his commitment that he will support this, like the Transport Secretary?"

The Prime Minister replied that she "makes an excellent case. She and I will ask the Transport Secretary to look into it and get back to her."

Commentators have pointed out, however, that the government does not run cross-Channel trains and no longer has any financial stake in Eurostar, the only current operator. Eurostar trains ceased making

any stops at Ashford or Ebbsfleet during the Covid pandemic in 2020, and the company has made it clear that it has no plans to restore its service to these stations.

In August, Virgin's plan to run a competitive cross-Channel rail service was given approval by the Office of Rail and Road, with track access granted from London St Pancras to the Channel Tunnel from October 2030. Italy's FS Italiane Group is also planning to run rail services through the Tunnel from 2029. Neither has made any commitment to serve Ashford.

Meanwhile, Kent County Council has endorsed a survey being conducted by local campaign group Bring Back Euro Trains to help demonstrate the commercial case for re-connecting Ashford and Ebbsfleet to international services. Almost 20,000 would-be passengers are reported to have registered their 'demand'.

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Demonstration outside Muriel Matters House 2025

Hastings Greens in Firing Line After National Zionism Vote

HUGH SULLIVAN

The chair of Hastings Greens Justin Lee Wynne resigned his position and cancelled his membership of the party last Friday citing two "main reasons".

The first related to a challenge within the local party by another member whom Mr Wynne accuses of bullying and harassing him over an issue of alleged homophobia and 'hate' campaigning. No details were

given, but the former chair referred to "relentless pressure [which] has taken a significant personal toll".

The second was his feeling "deeply uncomfortable" with the motion passed by the national party at their annual conference at Brighton on 4 October declaring themselves "anti-Zionist" and labelling Zionism as a form of racism.

At the time of going to press it is not clear whether there will be further local repercussions. However, the wording of the conference motion and of the briefing paper be-

hind it has clearly divided the party both nationally and locally.

National leader Zack Polanski has said that he would not personally have voted for it (he was absent campaigning in the Holborn and St Pancras by-election on the day), while some other local Greens have made public statements of regret.

Leader of Hastings Borough Council Glenn Haffenden endorsed a Facebook post by national deputy leader Rachel Milward stating not that the motion was wrong in principle but that she was "certain that it would have a divisive and distracting impact...It is heartbreaking today to see too many column inches focused on division, and not on calling out Israel's despicable actions and our government's complicity".

LIB DEMS AND LABOUR KICK IN

Those column inches indeed mushroomed over the following fortnight as other political parties piled pressure on local Greens to disown the anti-Zionist declaration.

On 7 October Hastings & Rye Lib-

eral Democrats wrote an open letter to their Green counterparts describing the motion as "reckless, divisive and counter-productive". They suggested that it might "fuel further polarisation and endanger local minority communities". Ten days later they described it on their website as "charg[ing] a minority British community with the crime of racism and recklessly implicat[ing] it in Israel's occupation and genocide...The motion fails to make a clear distinction between the ultra-nationalist Zionism propagated at the barrel of a gun, and the spiritual Zionism of ordinary British Jews practised peacefully in synagogues and around Friday night dinner tables."

In the meantime, local Labour party councillors spearheaded by Hastings & Rye MP Helena Doolittle wrote an emotive letter to all elected Green councillors on Hastings Borough Council. It described the conference motion as "shameful", and its adoption particularly harmful "at a time when Jewish people in our local area tell us they feel deeply unsafe, and continue to

face unacceptable levels of antisemitism". Each addressee was asked to make "a clear and unambiguous public statement in the next seven days...that you reject the 'Zionism is Racism' policy".

On the Hastings Decides Facebook stream, a group calling themselves the Hastings and District Jewish Community and identifying as "proud supporters of Israel" claimed that they were "already excluded from much that takes place in Hastings" and questioned whether they should now expect to be discriminated against by Green councillors. "Will you be taking even less notice of our view, comfort levels and, indeed, equal rights as citizens and residents of Hastings? Will you support the anti-Semites in the town even more vociferously than you already have?"

There has been pushback, however, from an opposing Jewish group, Hastings Jews for Justice (HJJ). Five local members signed a statement noting that the Green party "has been at the forefront of confronting the moral aberration of the Israeli State for many years".

They applauded the "courageous" conference decision, writing: "We object to the weaponisation of anti-Semitism, and do not accept that criticism of the Israeli state or of Zionism, the ideology on which it was based, amounts to an affront to Jews...We want people to know that those claiming to speak for Jews as 'proud supporters of Israel' do not represent us or the growing number of Jewish people across the UK and the world campaigning for an end to the genocide in Gaza, an end to ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, and an end to the occupation."

On Tuesday of this week, 20 October, HJJ were due to host at Stade Hall the showing of a film Planet Israel, in which British-American film-maker Gillian Moseley explores the social and political attitudes of Israelis themselves to the Gaza conflict and to ongoing settlements in the West Bank.

Council Turf War now Legal Challenge

East Sussex County Council's objection to the government proposal to transfer part of its territory to Brighton and Hove has been backed by a formal legal application for judicial review.

The transfer of four council wards covering East Saltdean, Telscombe and Peacehaven into the city of Brighton and Hove as part of the local government reorganisation of Sussex was directed in July by the then Communities Secretary Steve Reed following a consultation process in May/June. It was supposed

to take effect from April 2028.

However, Mr Reed resigned a few days later when Andy Burnham replaced Sir Keir Starmer as Prime Minister. Last month, his successor Angela Rayner "paused" the plans to re-draw council boundaries in order, she said, to be "clear-eyed" about what would be achieved by their implementation.

She had already abandoned equivalent proposals in four other areas where legal challenges were threatened. Now the East Sussex council, led by Reform UK council-

lors, has made a formal legal application to quash this transfer decision. It has been lodged on what their spokesperson calls "a protective basis" while a review is undertaken by Ms Rayner's department, so as not to be later time-barred.

The council spokesperson explained: "The decision would see 26,000 people being transferred across the boundary to Brighton and Hove. This is despite residents in the affected areas consistently raising serious concerns and overwhelmingly saying they wish to remain in East Sussex...We maintain that reorganisation would work best keeping East Sussex together and [should] remain focused on delivering excellent services to residents."

West Hill Lift Gets Lottery Boost

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has offered 'Round One development funding' of £531,000 to assist Hastings Borough Council in preparing detailed proposals to secure the long-term future of the West Hill Lift.

The Grade-II listed lift, which runs vertically up the cliff from George Street below Hastings Castle and its shortly-to-be-constructed Visitor Centre, needs a major restoration to improve accessibility and reliability.

Cllr Julia Hilton, deputy leader of the council and lead councillor for

regeneration, says that the future of the lift is "a vital part" of the Hastings Castle project funded by the Town Deal. "We are very grateful to the Heritage Fund and National Lottery players for this grant, which will allow us to complete the detailed design work and planning consents we need to make a further bid for funding to fully restore the lift."

A council spokesperson has indicated that the full restoration is likely to cost around £3.8 million, "but it very much depends on what the development stage shows".

Council lead member claims turnaround of recycling rates

JAMES PRENTICE & HUGH SULLIVAN

Defra (the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) has released last year's recycling performance data. It shows that Hastings has been recycling less of its household waste.

In fact, it demonstrates that the rate of recycling household waste was at its lowest since 2015. In 2025 the Hastings borough recycled 29.5% of its household waste, down from 32.2% just two years before. The national average was 41.5%.

In this same period, the amount of waste recycled per person also dropped significantly. At the end of 2023, 353kg of waste per person was recycled, yet by the end of last year this had reduced by 20kg per person. This reduction in recycling has seen Hastings drop down the recycling league tables and fall further behind the national average. In 2022, out of the 333 local authorities, Hastings ranked 47th from the bottom; in 2025 it fell to 37th, placing the borough just above the bottom 10th for recycling in Britain, and considerably lower than similar coastal communities (see adjacent table).

However, Cllr Becca Horn, lead councillor for community safety and environment services at Hastings Borough Council, insists not only that reducing waste and im-

proving re-use and recycling rates are "a top priority", but that they are moving back in the right direction. "It's important to note that published annual rates reflect the last full reporting year, so there's a bit of a lag. Whilst those figures for Hastings remain below the national average, we are encouraged by the progress we are now starting to see in our internal data."

She claims that in the first quarter of 2026/27, Hastings' recycling rate reached 39.5%, up from 31.4% during the same period last year.

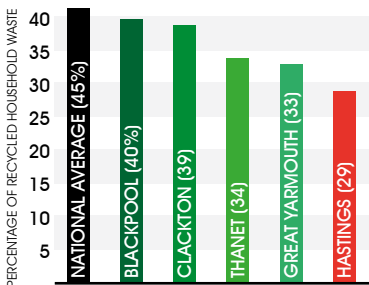
"The quality of our recycling is also improving, with our latest operational data showing less contamination," she says.

Cllr Horn suggests that there is increased awareness as a result of the weekly food waste collections and from residents recycling more materials, including toothpaste tubes and Tetra Pak cartons.

"Since weekly food waste collections began in April 2026, residents have recycled more than 1,000 tonnes of food waste. Hastings has also seen 974 tonnes less household waste compared with the same period from April to August last year.

"We are also pleased that residents are making use of other opportunities to reduce waste. Through our partnership with Anglo Doorstep Collections, residents have arranged 150 reuse and recycling collections, diverting more

HASTINGS HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING RATES COMPARED TO OTHER COASTAL COMMUNITIES



than five tonnes of material for reuse or recycling.

"It's early days, but we are keen to ensure this positive trend continues."

These updated figures suggest that the apparent increase in recycling is mainly being driven by improving food waste collections. So the national government's approach to reduce waste by delivering food waste bins to all households in boroughs where recycling is very low may be working.

They also seem to indicate that the Anglo Doorstep Collections deliver limited returns in comparison to the government's food waste bin strategy, raising questions of the former's cost-effectiveness. Those wishing to help reduce waste should make good use of those small orange-lid bins that were delivered to us earlier this year.

Hastings will hold its first Waste Action Community Assembly – a community conversation about all things waste – on Saturday 28 November at East Sussex College. Local group who would like to be involved should email cllr.becca.horn@hastings.gov.uk



PHOTOS: HUGH SULLIVAN

Old Roar Gill Property to be Auctioned without Reserve

A detached four-bedroomed extensively modernised property in St Leonards, 24 Foxcote, is to be auctioned next week with a nil reserve price. The reason: it has been languishing vacant for the past two and a half years under a No Occupation order issued by Hastings Borough Council (HBC) following a major landslip into the Old Roar Gill stream that runs at the bottom of its garden.

The landslip in February 2024 undermined a swimming pool in the garden but also left the house assessed by borough engineers as structurally unsafe.

The sellers, who had bought it in December 2020 for £465,000 and committed substantial financial investment into improvements before the disaster, joined subsequently with the owners of affected neighbouring properties to challenge the council on its own potential liability. They claimed that the stream itself and/or a public footpath (now closed) which ran between the stream and the properties were on land owned by HBC, and that it should take legal responsibility for what had occurred.

But the council has never accepted liability. Further investigation

seems to have stalled on the question of how survey costs might be shared between the council and affected owners or their insurance companies.

The auction will be conducted online by auctioneers based in Manchester, BTG Eddisons on 28 October: see enquiries@btgeddisonpropertyauctions.com



WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

✉Letter

TIME AND MOTION

Dear HIP
There's a wonderful silliness in our rail managers and local MP combining to knock an aggregate half an hour off the times of one return train per day to and from London at an extra cost of £37 (*Express Rail Service Gets Peak Time Pricing* in HIP 311). That's a charging rate of £74 per hour for the privilege of losing half an hour's extra time working on your laptop on the off-peak train leaving ten minutes later. Okay if you're on an expense account, Helena – the rest of us will cheerfully wait.

And who wants a faster train? The Brighton to London one-hour service turned that once-thriving resort into a dormitory town of rich DINKs (double income, no kids), inflating house prices to drive out families.

If the decision-makers knew anything about our railway line, they would be aware that we are blessedly protected from speedier trains by the one-track Victorian tunnels.

My personal experience of battling to save Winchelsea station in the 1980s was that the rail managers of that time regarded news of footfall and usage beyond Tonbridge as reports from outer darkness which they had no need to take

into account. No change there then.

Dr Kathryn Vale

✉From our website

POST OFFICE PENNIES

The post office on London Road in St Leonard's has been there for over 45 years that I know of (*Scaffolding, Struggle and St Leonards Post Office* in HIP 312). I can remember sitting outside it as a small child with my Guy Fawkes dummy, doing penny for the guy. Now here I am, 51 years old and still using that same post office. Let's fight to save it!

Sally Atkinson

We would love to hear from you.

✉ letters@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk
f facebook.com/hastingsindependent
i instagram.com/hastingsindependent

HIP does not endorse the views on the Letters page. They are solely those of the writer. 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

I'll Swim to France 2: A New Normal

HIP continues to follow SARAH MILNE as she prepares for her cross-Channel swim in 2027

There are decisions you make that change your life immediately. Others take a while to sink in. Deciding to swim the English Channel was an example of both. The contracts are signed, the boats booked and training has begun, so this is no longer a mad idea I can laugh about over coffee. It's happening. The solo swim may be twenty months away, but every week counts if I'm to have a realistic chance of making it across.

The Channel is a constant voice in the back of my mind. When is my next swim? What should I eat? How many kilometres have I done this week? And could I have done another 500 metres?

At first, those thoughts were overwhelming. I had to learn not to let swimming take over and distract me from other things like work, family and friends. I discovered early-morning, unfuelled swimming didn't suit me, and sea swimming needs to fit around tides, weather and safety. Luckily, working mostly from home gives me flexibility, so I start work early, taking a longer lunch break and heading to the pool. I swim most days and rest when my body or life demands it.

I miss it when I can't swim. The worries and stresses of everyday life fade away, and all I need to think about is the water, my breathing



Training with Kevin Murphy

and how efficiently I can move through it. Out of the water, I visualise my stroke while walking the dogs – imagining the drills I need to work on and the rhythm of my breathing. I look at the sea differently, noticing how the water moves with each tide and how the waves respond to the wind. Even sitting on the beach has become a kind of training session.

My routine includes two coached sea sessions, two pool Masters sessions and four solo practices cover-

ing technique drills, speed threshold and endurance work. I'm making the most of training in the sea while the water is mild enough for long swims.

Wetsuits aren't allowed in Channel swims, so I don't wear one. I'm increasing my weekly distance towards 35km a week – roughly the equivalent of the Channel swim. I've just passed the milestone of a 5km sea swim – a half-marathon. I'm aiming for a 10km marathon swim in November.

Most days, the Channel sits quietly in the background. Sometimes the overwhelm returns – after a sluggish swim when stronger swimmers leave me behind, or when I remember that people have died attempting this crossing.

The only comparable mixture of nervous excitement and constant awareness was during pregnancy. Then, another life was growing inside me; this time, a new way of life is growing around a very big dream – and it needs nurturing too. Women are often good at caring for everyone else while letting their own needs slip down the list. Channel training does not allow that.

My body needs fuel to swim, protein to repair and enough energy to recover. Unlike marathon training, this is not about becoming leaner: I need to build muscle and gain a little more body fat for buoyancy and insulation. That means learning to eat more, not less. For someone who has spent much of her adult life avoiding calorie counting, it's a surprisingly difficult adjustment. I need to think about getting enough food, without allowing nutrition to become another source of anxiety. It's a big part of this journey, so I'll be coming back to it.

For now, I'm settling into the strange new normal of a life based around training to swim the English Channel. A fuelling and recovery strategy is next on the list.



Jessica and the team

Direct Team Trek from Rye to Hastings

Colleagues working at Hastings Direct recently took on a challenging 12-mile trek to raise money and awareness for Parkinson's UK. The team tackled the Saxon Shore Way, covering 19.2 kilometres in five hours 25 minutes.

Starting in Rye, the route took the group through a mixture of historic landscapes, countryside and coastal paths, with plenty of climbs and descents along the way.

The challenge was made even tougher by an exceptionally hot day, putting the team's determination and teamwork to the test as they made their way towards the finish line in Hastings.

The challenge was organised by Jessica, who decided to fundraise for Parkinson's UK. She says:

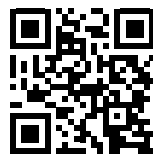
"I chose Parkinson's UK because Parkinson's has recently touched my own family, with someone very

close to me being diagnosed. A close friend's family has also been affected by Parkinson's, so it's a condition that feels particularly close to home for me.

"I wanted to do something positive to support a charity that helps people and families living with Parkinson's and hopefully raise a little awareness along the way. I'm really grateful that my friends and colleagues joined me for the challenge and supported me, and I'd also like to thank everyone who has been so kind with their words of encouragement and sponsorship."

Parkinson's UK Community Fundraiser James Beeching met the team at the finish line in Hastings. "It was brilliant to be there and see Jessica and the team come in after completing such a challenging 12-mile walk," he said. "It's particularly meaningful when people choose Parkinson's UK because Parkinson's has touched their own lives, and their fundraising will help us continue supporting people affected by the condition."

The challenge raised £685 for Parkinson's UK, helping the charity provide information and support, fund research and campaign for better services and care.



For information and support, visit the Parkinson's UK website at [parkinsons.org.uk](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk), or call the free, confidential helpline on 0808 800 0303.



ANITA KELSEY

Wacky Dog Show at the Pumphouse

ANITA KELSEY

For the past two years, the Pumphouse Café in Alexandra Park has teamed up with local charity The Sara Lee Trust to bring Hastings an alternative dog show packed with wonderfully wacky categories.

Adding a touch of pop-star glamour was a special doggy catwalk, supplied and set up by Andy Beauchamp. The runway, previously used at a Kylie Minogue concert, gave the dogs a stage to 'strut their stuff' and helped make the event extra special.

As well as raising much-needed funds, the event highlights the

trust's work, providing free specialised wellbeing and emotional support to people affected by cancer and other life-threatening illnesses.

The show also brings local dog walkers together, celebrating the community spirit that makes the Pumphouse Café such a valued meeting place. In a town as dog mad as Hastings, it's a winning combination.

A special mention goes to local schoolboy Win Pemberton-Powell, who set up a table to draw cartoon portraits of visitors' dogs and raise money for the trust. Win lives with ataxia telangiectasia, a rare, inherited condition, and his creativity and generosity made a wonderful contribution to the day.



Energise Sussex Coast's energy expert Martin Turner with a non-plug-in solar panel

Plug-in Solar Panels – Worth the Hype?

GABRIEL CARLYLE

Local community benefit society Energise Sussex Coast provides free energy and retrofit advice to East Sussex residents. Its energy expert Martin Turner has recently been getting a lot of enquiries about so-called plug-in solar panels.

Here, Martin explains what all the fuss is about and whether or not it makes sense for households to be buying this tech now, if they can afford it.

What is plug-in solar and why are people talking about it now?

Plug-in solar panels are portable panels that can be placed outdoors and plugged into a standard three-pin socket. Once you've done this, they're ready to use. As they're portable, you can easily take them with you if you move home.

The reason they're being talked about now is because before 27 August they weren't legal in the UK. But the law has now been updated so that – provided the panels meet certain standards – they're now lawful.

Does it replace traditional rooftop solar?

No. Plug-in panels are an alternative to rooftop solar rather than a replacement – they're cheaper and easy to install but will typically

generate less power per panel due to being more shaded. However they will enable people without available roofspace to get solar panels.

Are plug-in solar systems now available in the UK and how much do they cost?

They're available from numerous suppliers including Argos, City Plumbing, Ecoflow and Screwfix. They currently start at £340 for a single 400-watt (W) panel, and £450 for 2 panels (for a total of 800W). But some of them are much more expensive. Typical prices are £800-£1,000.

Can you just purchase and plug in?

Yes. Your plug-in solar system won't come under MCS (the UK's official quality mark for small-scale renewable energy systems) but you do have to notify the local network operator (in the southeast this is UK Power Networks) through UK Plug-in Solar Registration (myplugin.solar).

How much energy would one panel generate?

A south-facing, suitably-tilted and unshaded single-panel system could generate up to 1.8 units (kWh) of electrical energy per day in the summer, dropping to a quarter of that in winter, for a total generation of about 400 units a year.

A typical flat uses between 1,800 and 4,000 units of electrical energy

a year (depending on your heating system), so plug-in solar would only cover a small proportion of this.

Do you have to use the energy generated in real-time?

Yes, and you have to bear in mind that an 800W two-panel system is never going to produce energy at a rate above 800W. So let's say you have a two-panel system plugged in and that your daily usage is 6 units – typical for most flats. You might think, great, I'm generating 3.5 units in the summer – quite a big chunk of the 6 units.

But, you're only ever getting 800W of power (maximum) at any one time. And if you turn your kettle on, that typically needs 3,000W of power.

So if you're generating energy from the panels at a rate of 800W, if you need 3,000W at the same time, you'll still be taking electrical energy off the grid at a rate of 2,200W?

Yes, the difference would have to come off the grid.

How much could a household save by getting a plug-in system?

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) estimates that you could save between £70 and £110 a year with a two-panel system.

If you can use all the generated energy, the savings could be up to £200 a year (800 units at around 25p per unit) – but in reality it's going to be much, much lower than that. To make the biggest savings, you have to use the electricity as it's being generated because you can't store it.

What about batteries?

Currently plug-in batteries are not approved for use here, but it looks like this will be changing in 2027. It's just the safety aspect that needs to be approved.

What difference would having a battery make?

It improves the whole set-up dramatically because you can use much more of the energy that you're generating.

What would you say to someone who's thinking of purchasing a plug-in solar system right now?

Wait until spring! Prices for the systems are still higher than expected, and solar will generate much less through autumn and winter.



Energise Sussex Coast's Retrofit Advice Service provides independent and impartial advice to help you lower your bills, save energy and future proof your home. It can provide a short, free home visit focused on one thing that you're curious about, such as solar, insulation or a heat pump. For more information visit energise-sussexcoast.co.uk

Family Courts Survey

Victims and survivors of domestic abuse are being asked to share their experiences of Family Court proceedings in Sussex, highlighting what works well, the challenges they face and what could be improved. Survey feedback will be shared with the Sussex Family Justice Board to identify local improvements across the family justice system.

Family courts deal with matters including arrangements for children, separation and divorce, adoption and child protection. West and East Sussex County Councils and Brighton and Hove City Council support victims and survivors of domestic abuse and will use the feedback to improve processes directly affecting their journey through the family courts.

Gemma Taylor KC and Kieran

Lyons, Co-Chairs of the Sussex Family Justice Board, said the board was: "committed to improving the experiences of children and victim-survivors of domestic abuse involved in family court proceedings."

"Listening to people with lived experience is essential to understanding what works, where improvements are needed and how to make the family justice system safer, more responsive and trauma-informed. We encourage anyone with experience of the family justice system to take part in this important survey."

Anyone aged 18 or over who has experienced domestic abuse and been involved in family court proceedings in Sussex is encouraged to take part.

The survey runs from Monday, October 12 to Sunday, January 17, 2027, and takes 20 to 30 minutes. Participants can choose how much information they share, return later if they register for a Your Voice account, or stop at any time.



To find out more information or to take part, visit yourvoice.westsussex.gov.uk/family-court-survey

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Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604).



Hastings RNLI Station Ready for the Future

Plans for a brand new RNLI lifeboat at Hastings moved forward this week as trials of an ‘Atlantic 85’ boat took place.

It was announced last year that Hastings will receive a new Mk 4 Atlantic 85 class lifeboat in 2027. The high-powered inshore lifeboat

will replace the current Shannon class all-weather lifeboat, *Richard and Caroline Colton*, which has operated from the station since 2018. The decision was made as part of a wider strategy across the charity, ensuring it has the most appropriate lifeboats in the right places,

which will save the greatest number of lives.

As part of the preparations for the new boat, a much older Atlantic 85 has been at Hastings lifeboat station this week to trial launching the boat and recovering it back onto the beach. The results of the trial will be used to ensure that the most appropriate launching and recovery arrangements are used. The beach at Hastings is particularly difficult to launch from and recover back onto because of its steepness and the way the shingle constantly moves.

Hastings lifeboat operations manager Jo explains: “The crew is looking forward to the challenge of the new lifeboat, particularly suited to the majority of ‘shouts’ that we are called out for. The Atlantic 85 can be launched much more quickly than our current Shannon, needs fewer crew, and can also get closer to casualties trapped under the cliff. It also has a much higher top speed than either of our current lifeboats.

“It was great to see an Atlantic 85 here, although we will be getting a newer model than the one on trial this week. And for the trial we used an old ‘Talus’ tractor, first introduced over 50 years ago, to move the boat across the beach – which brought a touch of nostalgia too.”

Willemina’s Guiding Adventure

Willemina Hinton is a Ranger with St Leonards Division, but has set her sights beyond local or even county camps – she’s been selected to represent the London and South East region on the trip of a lifetime to Canada.

Next summer she’ll join 15 other girls to jet off to the *Dawn 2027 Jamboree* being held in Newfoundland, Canada. Large-scale events like this bring together Girlguiding and Girl Scout members from across Canada for a week of adventure activities including rafting and hiking as well as learning about the culture and wildlife in Newfoundland. The Rangers from England will join them and then extend their trip to include Niagara Falls and Quebec.

Fourteen-year-old Willemina is determined to fundraise for herself; from a cake sale at her local church, St Clements in Hastings Old Town, to a sponsored walk from Lewes to Hastings this week. With characteristic Girlguiding resourcefulness, she is challenging herself to do this

in style. As a keen Bonfire Society member, Willemina will set off from the headquarters of South Street Bonfire Society in Lewes to Eastbourne on Friday, in the costume of their bonfire society. On day two she’ll be in the more familiar, traditional, red, gold and blue striped ‘smuggler’ costume of Hastings Borough Bonfire Society. We’re expecting her to finish up at the headquarters of the society, The White Rock Hotel, on Sunday 25 October.

Willemina is always driving her development through the aid of Girlguiding. She achieved gold awards at Rainbows, Brownies and Guides and is currently a member of Amplify, a select group of young members whose voices shape the future of Girlguiding,



Interested in sponsoring Willemina? Visit justgiving.com/page/willemina-canada27



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The Weight of Crimson by Holly Rankin

HOLLY RANKIN was a student at East Sussex College Hastings when she wrote this story. As a budding author, and having been told that nobody used the ‘second person’ you, she rose to the challenge and proved the teacher (ahem) wrong. Happy Hallowe’en!

It was past midnight, and you were visibly exhausted. You had made an appearance at your friend’s house party; luckily for you, it was only a short but hazy walk from your house. On autopilot, following previously established plans, it felt as if you’d spent many hours preparing. High heels, makeup and your favourite dress with an odd red stain on it – although you had forgotten how it got there. Your hair was made up in a half-up and half-down fashion. You’d managed to incorporate braids that wove their way into an elegant bun, leaving the rest to swoon down your shoulders.

Underneath your perfectly placed hair, you felt a suspicious bump that throbbed with every step. Again, you couldn’t remember how you got it. What was that spot of red on your finger? You were only at the gather-

ing for a couple of hours, as you needed to... what? Run? Hide? Escape? From what, you couldn’t remember. You couldn’t remember why or what had caused such a disturbance in your mind, or even remember arriving at the party.

A heated disagreement with another guest had relit the fire of emotions you felt before the party. You left just as you arrived... angry. Due to your abundance of unwanted feelings, you started walking down a vaguely familiar street, a route you wouldn’t normally take, but one that had a reminiscence of familiarity. It was cold and dark, and you looked up at the sky to see thick, puffy clouds smothering the stars and threatening rain. The lamppost at the end of the street, the only light source, flickered spectrally. Its ominous light danced on the frost-cov-

ered cars, and the fallen leaves from the nearby surrounding trees lay resting or prancing around your feet. The oranges, browns and greens of the fallen leaves scattered upon the ground were the only sense of warmth. The leaves crunched beneath your feet, complementing the echo of your footsteps bouncing from all directions.

Uneasily, you continued to walk down the dimly familiar street. You’d heard about how the mind can play tricks on itself in the dark; you were sceptical, but that night was different. As the cold air caressed your hair, a shiver ran down your spine, but the cold wasn’t the source. Was it fear?

Your footsteps quickened as you felt a figure peering at you from behind one of the frost-covered cars. You glanced around. Yet when you looked, there was nothing to be seen; like a hidden agenda only the trees were in on. You could hear them whispering to each other as another draught of wind swept through the leaves. As you sped up, figures appeared around you, peering and leering from dark spaces: between cars, alleyway passages and behind trees. You noticed how the cold and the dark seemed to enclose themselves tighter around you. Your breath was getting harder; the cold’s icy air filled your lungs making them burn. Your heart was pounding so hard as if trying to escape the darkness as well as the burning agony in your lungs.

You swiftly turned the corner, and to your relief, you saw your garden gate. You ran to it, holding your breath, hoping and praying that once you’d passed its threshold, you’d be safe, finally with a refuge from this relentless darkness. You sighed a deep breath of relief as you managed to pull your house keys out of your pocket. Your front door clicked and gracefully creaked open as if welcoming you back home. You walked through the doorway and gently closed it behind you, leaving the cold and the dark in your wake; or so you

hoped. The silence was deafening. There was no sound, apart from your heavy breath and your heavy beating heart synchronising in harmony. The house was quiet and undisturbed, just as you left it earlier that evening. You took your heels off and stretched your aching feet. You wandered through your hallway towards the kitchen as if you were lost in a foreign land, with the same vague reminiscence of familiarity – as though the house was a stranger.

It was dark in the kitchen too, yet when you entered you didn’t turn on the light. The only light was from a streetlamp outside the kitchen window, making the surroundings shadowy and barely visible. You heard the ticking clock echo around the room, and a faraway dog barking purposelessly into the night. You walked over to the table and picked up an empty glass from the pile of plates and broken dishes askew on the table. You drifted to the sink, minding broken shards of plates and glasses scattered on the floor. Not questioning or wondering, only focused on one goal. You poured yourself a drink and voraciously gulped down that much-needed refreshing water, as though you had been lost in the desert for many years. While you indulged in the pristine water, not looking up from the quench-thirsting delight in your hands, the sound of dripping continued. A knife hanging off the side of the sink was dripping, but not with water – with something thickly oozing, something red. Drip... drip... drip...

You stared at the knife, and as you took a startled breath, a soft male voice asked, “So, how was your night?”

You froze; your grip tightened around the glass in your hand. You didn’t dare look. Panic started to rise in your chest as if something was about to erupt from you. “Not bad,” you responded, your heart palpitating uncontrollably. Your head was spinning and you started to feel sick in the pit of your stomach. Out of the corner of your eye, you could make out a figure sitting at the kitchen table. A shiver ran down your spine as if the cold had burst its way in and wrapped its suffocating arms around you. How long would it be until the darkness reached for you as well, you thought.

“Have you looked yet?” asked the figure as he started tapping his fingers on the table. His taps were in rhythm with the ticking clock and the dripping knife that still echoed around the silent kitchen. “Look,” said the voice.

You gulped hard. “No!” you uttered in hardly a whisper. Your grip was unyielding on your glass; one more fraction of dooming tension it would have shattered into a thousand pieces. The cold became more intense and the darkness started leering in.

“Look,” repeated the voice, more impatiently. You squeezed your eyes shut and you were visibly shaking

now, not with the never-ending cold but with an unrelenting, all-consuming fear. Your head was hammering, and your mind was racing with repulsive images. You knew you must look but would have given anything not to. Shaking like never before, with tears scalding your cheeks, you peered at the figure through watery lids.

“LOOK!” screamed the voice as he banged his fist on the table, knocking the half-empty glass out of your frozen hands.

Startled and panicked, you tore across the kitchen, slipping on the dark oozing substance which now seemed to be everywhere; your hands and legs were covered with the dark ooze, threatening to pull you into the ground. You struggled to your feet, desperately reaching for the light switch. The lights blinded you, and for a moment all your senses died: you were left with nothing but the monster trying to burst out of your chest.

Your eyes slowly adjusted to the sudden light; to your horror, the figure had disappeared, leaving behind a gruesome scene. The walls from floor to ceiling were splattered and drenched with a thick, glutinous liquid – which could only be blood. It was mixed in the shattered remnants of broken plates scattered in all directions, looking like an abhorrent, abstract artwork. Your eyes were reluctantly drawn to your kitchen floor. Laid before your feet was a man, drowned in a pool of his own blood. Dead.

The darkness crushed you as you tried to scream, but nothing came out. Panic and excruciating terror tore through your mind like scissors through paper as you stared at the body on the floor. Unable to scream, unable to move, your face was frozen in a silent scream. Tears continued to burn your cheeks.

The monstrous images of a struggle and a knife plunging into flesh pulled you out of your frozen state. You scrambled out of the room, stumbling through the hallway, knocking things over and trailing blood.

A photo of you and the man held in a tight embrace, frozen smiles now looking sinister, shattered on the ground. You tripped and fell onto your hands and knees; vomit erupted from the pit in your stomach. Despite the confused images and the piercing scream of the mysterious figure reverberating through your head, you managed to call 999 before blacking out.

The sound of distant sirens broke the deafening silence where you lay on the ground. Retching and heaving, you staggered to your feet, stumbling towards the door. The red, blue and white flashing lights filled the hallways and engulfed the entrance. Taking a deep breath, you slowly opened the door. You stepped out onto the garden path and, with a final glance at the flowing trees and a last listen to the attentive whispers of the wind, you raised your hands in the air.



Neil Sellman at the Café door

Parlez-Vous Franglais

VICTORIA KINGHAM explores an on-stage café and its residents

Encountering David Manners for the first time, you'd be forgiven for passing him in the street. A slight, quiet, youthful figure in a cap and jeans, his appearance belies the enormous talent and philanthropy which seem to be second nature to him. Ahead of his splendid new production, *Café Franglais*, we did a little research on his background and that of the other actors in this unusual show.

David Charles Manners was brought up a Mormon, but as a young man was excommunicated from his church. In one of his books, *Limitless Sky*, he writes about a journey to the Himalayas, in part to find a connection which had been minimised and mythologised by his immediate family.

The family he sought were there: 36 cousins living on the hereditary family tea plantation, and the myths were actuality. Introduced to a Shaman in North Bengal, he underwent an initiation, part of which was to spend a night with a freshly-dead body. As a result of this and other psychotropically-aided experiences, he made the decision that thereafter "every single day would be lived more fully and more intensely than it had ever been before."

Twelve years later, this resolution has been profoundly fulfilled. Not only has vastly intelligent polymath Manners written a number of well-reviewed books based on memoirs of his extraordinary family, he is a musician, composer and stage designer, and has also been awarded the British Empire Medal for his work in the charity Savra, which he co-founded in aid of leprosy sufferers.

This man of limitless imagination now lives in Eastbourne, and Hastings is lucky enough to have him associated with The Stables Theatre as a writer and producer. He has written and masterminded a number of plays and other productions here, including *Picture Perfect*, starring acclaimed actor Liza Sadovy, soon to be released as a film with Janie Dee.

THE PRODUCTION

Among a number of other projects, Manners' company, BallyBest, has produced some unique multi-linguistic stage projects. You can find a review of the last one, *Kabarett*, by following the link below this article. The most recent, shown a couple of weeks ago, is a delicately-concocted narrative made up of

French and English songs, sung by the extraordinary Tamara Leggett, whose astonishing ability with language, gorgeous voice and communicative excellence tell a story to the audience even if they don't understand French.

"Forty years ago," says Manners, "I was working with a French singer, playing piano in West End bars. And so I had a pile of French music that I'd never found anybody capable of singing since, primarily because of the language. So Tamara was an absolute gift, because her ability with language and her speed of learning are extraordinary."

The tribute is well-deserved. Tamara is modest about her achievements. In *Kabarett* she sang in Yiddish, German, French and English. In *Café Franglais* she sings French songs as though she were born to do it. She says she doesn't speak German but grew up listening to the conversation of her German grandparents; she spent her teenage years singing along to Celine Dion under her duvet, not wanting people to hear her sing. She's happy, she says, listening to songs in any language. "It wasn't just Celine Dion," she elaborates. "I listened to Edith Piaf and Charles Aznavour." She's centre-stage almost all the time in this production, but skilled enough to improvise, ad lib or change the order of songs, and the rapport between her and Manners is close enough for her to communicate spur-of-the-moment changes.

It came as something of a surprise to me that though she has the air and the accomplishment of a seasoned professional, she doesn't have a long previous career in either acting or singing: "I have," she says, pointing to her head, "just in here!" When she



PHOTOS: PETER MOULD

Left to right: David Manners, Neil Sellman, Tamara Leggett

had the children, she decided to get some singing lessons and do what she had always known she wanted to do. Hastings, in fact, was the first place in which she performed.

With Leggett, and Neil Sellman (who is also director of The Stables, but I'll come back to that) *Café Franglais* sold out two nights at our theatre. The setting is simple yet effective – a pianist and café proprietors recount their lives in song. People sit at little tables with red gingham cloths and candles, drink wine and eat things – almost stereotypically French *bistro*. There's a backdrop of the front entrance of the café, cleverly projected, that looks like something out of Toulouse-Lautrec. Inside, the proprietors move about, muse and reminisce.

THE SONGS

There's something about songs in the French language that makes everything sound wistfully ironic. They look back to shared moments in Paris or on the beach; they determinedly tell their lover that they don't love them; they forgive past infidelities; they remember romances under Paris skies. There are references to brief affairs, illicit loves, disappointments and loss, and to continuing to live with all of those. At the very least, *Tout Le Monde Veut Dev'nir un Cat*, because in spite of life's disappointments, a cat always lands on its feet.

In English, the very tragic mirth of Noël Coward (*Let's Say Goodbye* is about a brief, memorable affair between two men) is interspersed with a couple of American blues songs, songs by Ivor Novello (extraordinary Welsh songwriter, known to have had a relationship with WWI poet Siegfried Sassoon) and then *The Boy From...* Stephen Sondheim's inversion of *The Girl From Ipanema* where in fact the woman who sings it is oblivious to the gayness of the man to whom she is attracted: *Why are his trousers vermilion? / Why does he claim he's Castilian? / Why do his friends call him Lillian? / And I hear at the end of the week, / he's leaving to start a boutique*. It pokes fun at a stereotype, but also at the idea of first-time infatuation.

Between them, the three performers have combined the 35 numbers into something that isn't an

exact narrative, but leaves an overwhelming impression of the two café proprietors reconciled to their lives with each other while remembering moments of passion with someone else. Well into middle age, they clear tables, chop vegetables, light candles, serve customers and sing about the past. It's an evocative, imaginative show performed with grace and a little daring.

THE SKILLS

Neil Sellman, chair and general manager at The Stables, is also comfortable acting and singing in French. Hastings-born, he leads the Board of Trustees and Council of Management at the theatre to ensure the organisation delivers on its charitable objectives and maintains good governance. He liaises between the council (who contribute funds), the many volunteers, and the productions and events.

Overseeing dozens of new productions, he has transformed the theatre from a purely local venue into a well-known centre for dramatic innovation, including classes and opportunities for young actors. His background is the management of a charity for people with learning disabilities, but he has performed in plays and shows in Hastings, Lewes, Brighton, Eastbourne and London (at The Seven Dials). He, Leggett and Manners got together after he directed them in a performance of *A Christmas Carol* in 2023.

Between the three of them, then, are all the skills needed for great musical theatre – skill, huge talent, commitment, mutual admiration and – it seems – quite a lot of love between them. There's another project in its early stages – expect it to emerge in nine months. Meanwhile, treasure The Stables Theatre, its marvellous productions, community projects, art gallery, volunteers, and general engagement with the local public. It's unique.



Taking part in *Café Franglais* on 30 September and 1 October were David Manners (pianist), Tamara Leggett (soprano) and Neil Sellman (tenor). Stables Theatre: stablestheatre.co.uk/. David Manners: davidcharles-manners.com

Light Blue Touch Paper

DAVID MILTON

Flatland Projects rarely sticks to the framed-pictures-on-a-wall gallery format. Sometimes it rather resembles a laboratory or playground. The message it typically gives off is "Work In Progress" and more often than not you're asked to do a bit of work yourself, to do some thinking. But the current exhibition, David Gilbert's *Slips*, is relatively light-hearted and easy on both eye and brain. It comprises half a dozen small photographs from the artist's recent past and an entirely new work, much larger and taking up two entire walls.

This commission comprises *The Sea, The Sea*, a diptych of hand-cut paper sculptures of larger-than-life fish skeletons, one dressed with big bows, drapes and some tiny Scarlett O'Hara bustle gowns (all photographs); and *Two Fish (II)*, an enormous photographic print of the same skeletons, set in stark sunlight



David Gilbert, *The Sea, The Sea* (2026)

on a dazzling blue background. If it seems simultaneously both cryptic and ecstatic, a moment's reflection suggests we're inside the realm of reflection itself and have entered a slickly conceptual *trompe-l'œil*.

The curatorial commentary draws parallels with Peter Hujar and David Wojnarowicz, who both featured recently in De La Warr Pavilion's *To Improvise A Mountain: Lynette Yiadom-Boakye Curates*. But there's none of those artists' raw and sometimes savage examination of the human body. Instead, Gilbert's is a poetry of loss: settings

from which people have departed, leaving behind them spindly objects to serve as relics of their desiccated Giacometti bodies. Despite this, the installation calls out for social interaction, deploying what Nabokov characterised as "colours and shades that seem to enjoy themselves in good company".

An ascetic atmosphere of pinprick precision informs the smaller images. We pass from a cookie-cutter cosmos to a sinister doily-like ribcage to a rice paper window which flaps not in another window but in the frame of the pho-

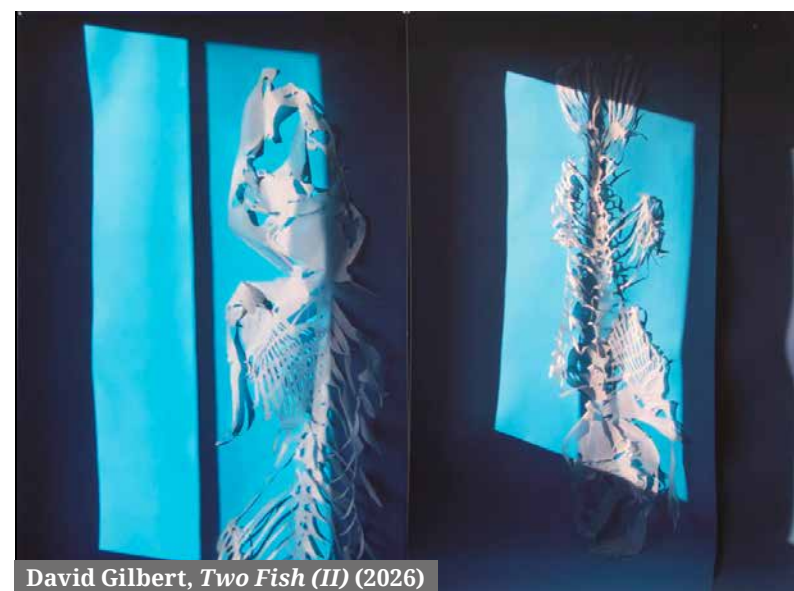
tograph itself. Gilbert lives in Los Angeles and it shows. He offers fragmentary scenes from a *Mildred Pierce*-ish melodrama, shadows shifting in waves of arid air which contain a silent scream. It's as darkly camp as one of Joan Crawford's walk-in wardrobes.

The artist's complex creative process, and determined foregrounding of a culture of reproductions, suggest a key formal reference to the work of Robert Cumming, the slow reveal of whose illusionary visions is accentuated in the fastidious sleights of hand of Gilbert's *Slips*. The set pieces also bring to mind Calum Colvin's more baroque and historically charged photographic tableaux in their purposeful accumulation of gnomic signifiers. But unlike Colvin there's no visible po-

litical intent in Gilbert's imagery. Content-wise it's seemingly irony-free, despite the insistently ludic formal methodology.

Also on show is another of Annie Whiles's *Doorway Guardians*, a touring series of charming carved wooden chimeras. *Attendant* is a waxed oak gargoyle, part pygmy elephant, part cowl vent, part abstract sculpture. It's impossible to meet its glassy-eyed somnambulist's stare; impossible too not to run a hand across its smooth warm buttocks or stroke its great flapping ears. A palpable joy.

Exhibition runs to 16 January 2027, Thursday to Saturday, 12.00pm to 4.00pm. Flatland Projects, Unit 22 Beeching Road, Bexhill-on-Sea TN39 3LJ.



David Gilbert, *Two Fish (II)* (2026)

Peep Shows

DAVID MILTON

Discrete Violations presents a selection of the work of Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978), an American artist whose practice moved from the study of architecture to a form of fine art with few peers and, until the rise of postmodernism, no imitators. He cut holes in buildings; split them in two; used demolition to reveal something elemental about the cityscape, making erudite man-caves and giant peepholes – meditations on an era of mass destruction and complex philosophical conundrums made concrete, aestheticised.

Placing this small, precise, extraordinary exhibition in the De La Warr Pavilion while it is being refurbished is a quiet stroke of genius. It comprises modest photographs, film and documents – mere fragments of an art without precedent, singularly idiosyncratic and focused, to be mentioned in the same



Gordon Matta-Clark, *Walls (Wallpaper)*, Documentary Photograph

breath as Christo/Jeanne-Claude and Rachel Whiteread. Labour intensive and requiring all the knowledge that goes *into* construction to get *out of* building, Matta-Clark's works are monumental, fugitive and deeply enigmatic. They seem quixotic, even absurd. But *Discrete Violations* is altogether inspiring and exciting – the kind of thing that,

in Raymond Chandler's phrase, would make a bishop want to kick a hole in a stained glass window. Truly visionary.

Chamber comprises video, sculpture, sound-art and paintings by British artist Prem Sahib. It's all over the place. The emphasis is on ugly materiality – steel, tiles, sodium light, synthetic fabric. *Exit* is a



Prem Sahib, *Kin*

glistening panel of sweaty beads of black resin. Along with several other works here it conforms to Fred Moten's incisive ideas around 'blackness as aesthetic sociality,' reflective and eschewing introspection and abstraction in favour of engagement and disruption.

Any hope that such themes might be teased out across the show are confounded by the curatorial panel which tells us it merely "reference[s] the sauna". Other tired tropes of urban gay life are trotted out in lieu of intellectual contextualisation, along with the gamut of artworld clichés. There should surely be a moratorium on the idea of 'the threshold,' a statute of limitations on 'liminality' –

here represented in *A Passing*, two entirely unremarkable doors from a London leather bar. There's frankly more liminal art evident in the gents at The Pig.

Dourly dystopian and clammily claustrophobic, the show suffers from proximity to the single-minded Matta-Clark and suffers too from comparisons to other artists. If *A Waiting Room* (a clear tabletop, the legs of which are those of a shiny black flea) brings to mind Allen Jones's notorious late 1960s *Table* (a clear tabletop on a fetishised female body), the dead hand of late 1980s Damien Hirst is detectable in *Stone*, a water fountain encased in blue resin.

Like much else on show, they're strangely sanitised and stiffly unrevealing. Only *Kin*, a digital animation of a stray dog that weaves its way across the gallery floor to an acceleration/deceleration soundtrack straight from the playbook of Louis and Bebe Barron, truly brings the exhibition to life. It's genuinely engaging, a vaporous, uncanny counterpoint to the lumpen artworks around it.

Exhibitions run to 3 January 2027, Monday to Sunday, 10.00am to 5.00pm. De La Warr Pavilion, Marina, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 1DP.



Edlund Jurd and Goller at Barnaby's

VICTORIA KINGHAM

A couple of years ago I interviewed Rebecka Edlund for this paper. At that time she had fairly recently graduated, and the band she was touring with was called Virgin Forest. Her self-produced CD of the same name was in its early planning stages. It's due for release quite soon, and readers can hear an exclusive preview on the link at the end of this article.

Two years and a crowd of tours, recordings, nominations and awards later, she is touring with a trio, Jurd (as before) on trumpet with Ruth Goller on bass – a dream combo for Edlund's unique compositions. Jurd's trumpet lines are always straight, true, measured and mellow. Goller, while she lays down definitive rhythmic riffs, uses chords, with reverb and other effects to augment the sound of what is a completely original, wholly-unclassifiable band.

Edlund plays a 12-string guitar and a modern harmonium with which she produces folk-style drones. Folk music is one source of her inspiration – before studying in London she studied Scandinavian traditional music. At Trinity, she

studied jazz, adding its adventurous complexity to her own work. Vocally, and with great purity of sound, she moves easily between head voice and chest voice, through a considerable range. During a couple of completely improvised sessions she added vocal effects – she's able to produce an astonishing number of sounds, including authentic whistly birdsong. A bit like Badi Assad or Bobby McFerrin, though the music is all her own.

The other numbers were songs about her life – her Swedish grandmother, her landlady and friend in Greenwich, her first love, songs to her younger self – all sung with her customary tonal clarity. Jurd supplies tasteful ostinatos and some lovely restrained solo breaks, and Goller an orchestral bass. Edlund was quick to acknowledge their musicianship right at the start.

Their last number she announced as "a letter to the future as well as the past". For this trio with this amount of talented invention, the future seems bright.

Rebecka Edlund, Laura Jurd, and Ruth Goller played at Barnaby's Jazz Lounge on 6 October, as part of Hastings Jazz Festival. CD Preview here: tinyurl.com/yc8jrf6u

Celebration of Live!

Celebration of Live! is a two-day festival celebrating everything that makes live music special. It will bring together some of Hastings' most beloved musicians, exciting emerging talent and internationally recognised performers.

Curated by local musician and promoter, Mike Willis, the event is also a celebration of Hastings' distinctive musical character, not just the talent on stage, but the local audiences that bring a passion and energy to their love and support of local music in the town. Capturing the vitality and engagement, the inspiration and diversity that live music creates and grows, the weekend will have two very different musical personalities: Saturday is about energy, rhythm and dancing; Sunday celebrates songwriting, musicianship and audience participation.

FILL THE DANCEFLOOR
Want to dance? Saturday is your day with a lively, eclectic line-up designed to get people moving to the likes of The Jumpsters, a swaggering, swinging ensemble mixing jazz, vintage country and honky-tonk and Mike Willis & The Get 'Em On Up Boys, a special return for the very first band Mike assembled after settling in Hastings. The evening will culminate in a full-on dancefloor celebration with African Head Charge, internationally recognised pioneers of psychedelic dub, African rhythms and experimental dance music.

FILL OUR CUPS
Love music and community engagement? Sunday is your day, with an afternoon and evening celebrating the strength of Hastings' songwriting community, musical collaborations and shared love of songs. The afternoon starts with Ben Maier, one of the local scene's most beloved singer-songwriters, and continues with Kid Kapichi, one of Hastings' best-known musical exports. Sunday's programme culminates with a performance by Southern & Friends, Mike Willis's newest musical project, bringing American roots music together with a distinctly British sensibility, and joined by a who's who of Hastings' top-tier musicians.

Originally from the US, Mike has spent years promoting and creating opportunities for live music in Hastings and St Leonards, through Mike's List and Live at Mike's. He's



also a prominent local performer and is excited to reunite with his first Hastings band on Saturday evening and to present his newest project, on Sunday. This will represent the next chapter in his musical journey, bringing together musicians and audiences from across the local scene.

Dates this weekend, 24-25 October. Tickets: mikeslist.uk. Standard day admission £20. Two-Day VIP pass £35, with priority entry across both days. People who are unable to attend but want to support live music in Hastings and St Leonards are welcome to make a £5 supporter donation.

Artificial – Yes it Is

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Recently I experimented with a free program called type.ai, which, quite startlingly, will produce a whole novel on very few prompts, and even a small eerie picture-link based on what it knows of you, the 'author'. Some of the written output is conventionally amusing and, of course, perfectly grammatically correct. On the whole, it made me feel physically sick and inclined to smash its perfectly-constructed synthetic face, except the only way I could do that would be to throw my MacBook at the wall, and the revolting text would still be there, hovering in the Cloud and available to anyone with an access password (and plenty without one).

Most of the 'writing' jobs now advertised are for feeding AI, proofreading AI, translating AI into local dialect, that kind of thing. A conglomerate of intelligent writers from top-class universities have thus fed it countless millions of possible sentences, allowing it to become an infinite mine of perfectly correct interchangeable clichés. It writes dialogue that wouldn't look out of place in Enid Blyton, except that it pulls in 'authentic' slang and rarefied terminology from any disagreeable culture you like to name: drug cartels, incest, sexual violence, crooked lawyers, the music industry, the delivery business...

The thing about monkeys and Shakespeare doesn't seem so unlikely nowadays. The AI companies, or indeed the AI itself without hu-

man intervention, are/is able to recruit the crème-de-la-crème because there are few other ways of making money by writing, and the pay for most jobbing journalists (apart from the handful of celebs) is risible. The output of good writers is smothered within this synthetically sampled soup, but what is more terrifying is its constant improvement, based on any kind of human access whether from users or contributors. Quite soon any thoughtful evaluation or critical study will need to centre not only on whether an article has been copied from somewhere (à la Jason Arday) but on whether the writer is a person or a machine. This criterion will (arguably already does) apply not just to writing but to everything.

Standard technology simulates the real world; artificial intelligence is set to replace it. If you think you use AI, don't be fooled – it uses you. Read the novels of William Gibson: 30 years ago he knew roughly what lay ahead. Couple that with Orwell's doublethinking Ministry of Truth and see the world as it now is. You're welcome to it.

CORRECTION

In our round-up of Hastings Jazz Festival last issue, we referred to a trumpeter as Pete Auckland. This should have been Joe Auckland. We also referred to the Printworks as the Paintworks! Apologies for both these errors.



Pictures at The White Rock

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra's 10 years in the business was celebrated on 13 October with a concert at the White Rock, with the largest orchestra Marcio Da Silva has conducted since he was here.

The orchestra played with great enthusiasm to a diverse audience: stalwart supporters of Hastings International Piano, families, musicians, teenagers pretending to look bored, elderly people, people with learning difficulties and (I think) a delegation from the Darvell Bruderhof Community based near Robertsbridge. The White Rock thronged, the bar was full, and people were very happy to be there. It was an intentionally popular programme: film themes by John Williams for *E.T.* (my favourite reluctant lump-in-the-throat Hollywood movie), *Harry Potter*, *Jurassic Park*

and *Star Wars* were all extremely well received.

The two main pieces were chosen for their familiarity. First Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, with its near-cliché variation 18. This is most often played in isolation, and has been used as a theme tune or incidental music for so many things – *Some-where In Time*, yes, but also *Singapore Sling*, *Groundhog Day*, and the classic CBS series *The Good Wife* (though Trump has now trivialised all previous political scandals, and that series and *House of Cards* could probably never be made the same way again).

What is it about Rachmaninov? The epitome of lush Romanticism, his compositions pull you apart inside. Whether it's over-performed or not, this is Rachmaninov and for me it's quite impossible *not* to be affected by it. It was a welcome change to hear *all* of the variations, played impeccably by Mariamna



Sherling and Da Silva receive tumultuous applause

Sherling, who is a past winner of the Piano Competition here but has, before and since, won masses of awards and is well on her way to international fame. She is a pupil of the director of the Piano Competition (and Piano Professor at the Royal Academy) Vanessa Latarche, who says of her that she is "a beautiful person – beautiful inside and out". Her pianism is of course magnificent and she is able to add depth and expression to the most challenging pieces in the world.

Marcio Da Silva's trademark seems to be the instant start; he walks on to the stage, raises his arms, and begins – none of the suspense of waiting for the audience to stop rustling and coughing, or for the orchestra to pick up their instruments – everyone has to be ready. And it has sometimes seemed to me, perhaps because of this, that he takes music forward at breakneck speeds, but actually the *Rhapsody* is superfast anyway. Furthermore, twice, 90 years ago, Rachmaninov

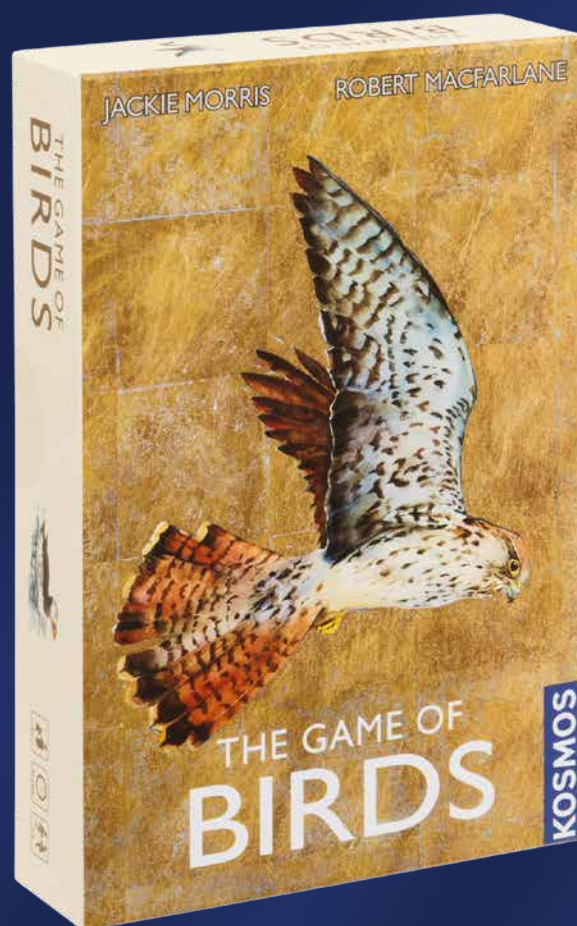
(a virtuoso pianist as well as immortal composer) gave a recital at the White Rock. Brilliant.

The other popular piece at the concert was Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Da Silva and the orchestra have worked hard on this one, and the movement concerning the (picture of) unhatched chicks featured especially fine playing from the expanded string section. This 1922 arrangement by Ravel is another piece where one movement is especially well known, and *The Great Gate of Kiev* didn't disappoint. Originally composed in 1874 for piano, the suite has been orchestrated, re-imagined, re-arranged, and re-scored countless times, (notably years ago by Emerson, Lake, and Palmer) but it was also used in *The Big Lebowski* as a score for a spoof modernist ballet performance – watch it on YouTube, I did.

This concert was a deserved triumph for Da Silva and an orchestra that had a clear response to his boundless enthusiasm and hard-working approach. Along with the International Piano Competition, Da Silva's work with orchestra, choir and opera companies is helping to transform Hastings into a national centre for classical music. If it isn't already there.

Featuring beautiful illustrations from Jackie Morris and the poetic prose of Robert Macfarlane

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BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

What's Changed for Home Renters?

EVICION: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF RENT BY JESSICA FIELD
PUBLISHED BY VERSO, 2026, RRP £12.99 AT BOOKBUSTER
REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

A friend came into Bookbuster the other day. She had had several ‘no fault’ evictions over the last few years. She was looking for a room, nothing more, but couldn’t find anything under £600 a month. For a room. Fifteen years ago you could get a two-bed flat for that.

Recent changes to tenants’ rights are, sadly, too little. No real effort has been made to cap or reduce rents, or to reintroduce tribunals. Legal powers are not dictated by fairness or justice, but dictated from the top, and the rich and powerful are in many cases landlords. A fifth of MPs (and Lords) are landlords, including 44 Labour MPs. Change requires mass solidarity, something the English are no longer much good at. Nationally, a third of us are in rental accommodation, a figure only marginally lower for Hastings where 30% of us are: so in theory we have some power if we united.

IN HASTINGS THE LANDLORD USUALLY HAS HIS WAY

One of the areas Jessica is especially good on is the way that housing estates that were mostly rental had a sense of community, and in how that has changed, and on how those of us renting outside such estates are in a

precarious position, more or less constantly moving and thus not really experiencing the kind of community solidarity that could be rallied to oppose eviction. This situation is made worse by property developers and landlords subscribing to a ‘buy low, sell high’ profiteering mentality. Many evictions are preceded by rent hikes, aimed not at getting more money from a sitting tenant, but as a first move to lever people out of their own accord, with the aim of selling, or refurbishing and renting out again at much higher rates. ‘Robbery without violence’, and in the words of the NCB, ‘increase in rent will induce the mine worker to leave the house. If at the end of the three months he has not left the house he is served with a Notice to Quit’. In essence this tactic is still rife in Hastings: ‘the landlord usually has his way in the end’.

Sadly though, even popular and united opposition is no guarantee of successful resistance. Jessica Field’s book, *Eviction*, gives a detailed account of the history of rent, both private and public sector, since 1945. The trigger for her investigation is her family’s experience of eviction and of activism and campaigning against eviction in Leeds. The estate they lived in was in Oulton, and is both disparagingly and, for some, affectionately known as ‘Cardboard City’. This is because it was a large pre-fab project, using concrete slabs. The estate was originally built for local

miners and their families, and they had neither a private landlord nor were they council houses. This is one of the interesting aspects of the Leeds experience, as compared to the majority of ‘home county’ situations: the housing was government owned and the landlord was the National Coal Board.

NCB were long gone. The whole estate was up for redevelopment, is now mostly empty and boarded up, the tenants long gone. No redevelopment has begun yet. There was still a real community, and Jessica’s mother was instrumental in the fight, forming ‘Save Our

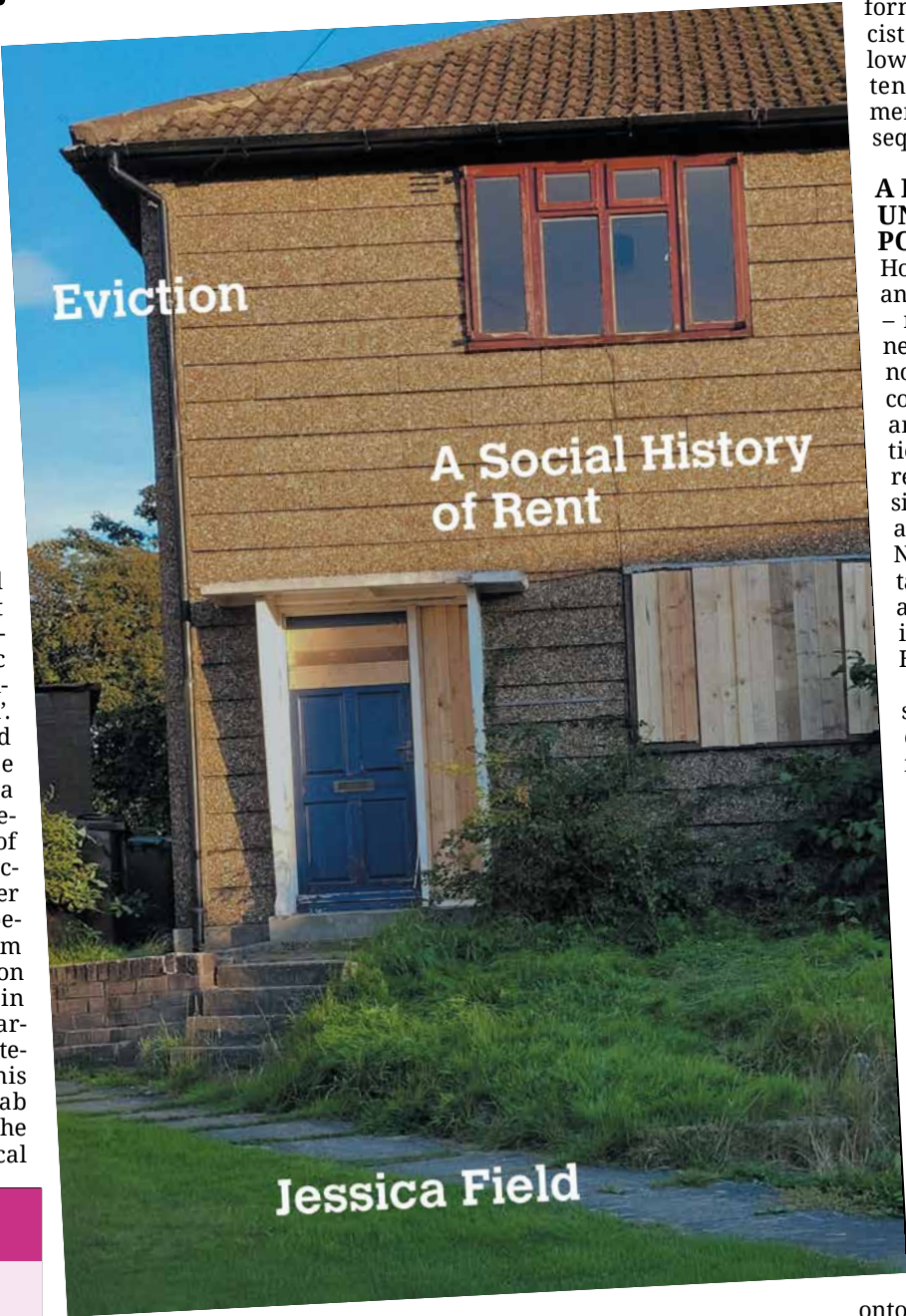
The fight got national media attention, though ultimately to no avail. An important aspect of eviction is discussed, not just with regard to Leeds, but ubiquitously: and that is the effect precarity and the constant threat of eviction has on mental health. I have long advocated a Universal Basic Income, and reform of the bureaucratically fascist DWP, both of which along with lower rents and more security for tenants would likely halve the mental health crisis and, as a consequence, more than pay for itself.

A FECKLESS UNDERCLASS OF THE POOR POPULATION

However, it was a great campaign and is covered in some detail here – recommended reading if you need to fight an eviction notice, not just as a cautionary tale but constructively too. Two sections are especially important, ‘eviction as violence’, and ‘silencing resistance’. Jessica also gives insight into other campaigns, such as Focus E15 in Newham, and New Era in Hoxton. She also talks, for example, about ACORN, a renters’ union also active here in Hastings; Sisters Uncut; and Hands Off Our Homes.

The book gives a great description of the negative changes wrought to rental housing, mainly from the time of Thatcherism onwards, and is interesting too on how our view of the past, from 1945 onwards is often seen through rose-tinted spectacles, as we were then too seen as a ‘feckless underclass of the poor population’. As Jessica says, ‘Our private renting experiences were not unique – not then, in 2004; not 150 years ago; not now. Nor were they particularly terrible when compared to that of many other evicted families over the past century and a half. But frequency shouldn’t mean acceptance, because it was difficult – in more ways than I’m prepared to spill onto these pages.’

ACORN Hastings can be contacted via [ACORNHastings](#) on both Facebook and Twitter



By the time of Jessica’s family’s ‘no fault’ eviction notice, in 2017, things had changed radically, and

Homes LS26’ (LS26 is the Oulton postcode). In fact the important role of women in such campaigns is highlighted throughout the book.

POETRY CORNER

RUSTY GIANTS SURROUND US
HENRY NORMAL

The sky over Winchelsea beach
is twinned with raspberry candyfloss

There's a showroom of cloud types
at all points of the compass

The sun freefalls over Fairlight
throwing tangerine and salmon east

Shrubs and pebbles provide a skirting board
but it's the cotton chandeliers that elevate the heart

Even the steel blue of the sea
softens to rosewood and coral

Light tricks with the faces of gods
The moment is too big for memory

CROSSWORD CORNER

Across

1. Or they contained ideas to explain why something happened (6)
3. To some extent editors set up with temporary shelters (6)
4. One who pays to use teen RR (6)

Down

1. One who tries out street rearrangement (6)
2. Drey on confused location in the distance (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 3 of The HIP List

1					2
	Hastings Independent Five-Clue Cryptic Crossword				
3					
	No. 313 by Peat Poser				
4					

FOOTBALL

United Back on Top

10 October

Sheppey Utd1

Hastings Utd2

13 October

Margate2

Hastings Utd2

17 October

Hastings Utd2

Erith Town0

HUGH SULLIVAN

Hastings United returned to the top of their league (Isthmian South East Division) last Saturday after two more wins and a draw – and their supporters are loving it.

Crowds for the first league and FA Trophy games at the Pilot Field in August numbered around 600. Since then, further home attendances have averaged over 1,000 per game. And with four more successive home games scheduled over the next two weeks, starting with the hosting of near neighbours Eastbourne Town on Tuesday this week (after this newspaper went to press) followed by a Trophy cup-tie tomorrow (Saturday) against Waltham Abbey, there's a buzz of anticipation that Ronnie Dolan's team can con-

RUGBY

H&B Fall Short

October 17

Hastings & Bexhill3

Vigo18

MAX MOWBRAY

H&B's second game of the season in the Kent League was another disappointment, adding a second loss and further injuries to the growing tally. Old opponents Vigo opened the



Freddie Legg attacks Erith fullback

tinue their run of positive results. In truth, the past fortnight's results have been more impressive than the performances which earned them. At Sheppey on 10 October, Hastings struggled for much of the game to justify their higher league position and fell behind midway through the second half. But Freddie Legg, brought on as substitute for Mitchell Chapman, equalised from close in, and a minute later Kesna Clarke scored the winner.

Three days later at Margate, the 'U's conceded a goal in the second minute before hitting back with two goals from set pieces. Chapman put them level before halftime with a header from a corner. Then, in the

second half, captain Tom Chalmers also headed in from a free kick, swung into the penalty box by Max Walsh. This time they couldn't hold on to their 2-1 lead, the home side scoring their second five minutes later from a defensive error to earn a share of the points.

Last Saturday, third-placed Erith Town came to the Pilot Field

and, though the 'U's had the majority of possession for the first 30 minutes, displayed a resilience in defence which the home side found hard to break down. Then their goalkeeper Henry Molyneux tussled with Legg and, in a moment's loss of control, felled the Hastings midfielder with a seemingly deliberate blow. The referee had no option but to brandish a red card and award a penalty, smartly converted by Clarke past the substitute keeper. For the rest of the half, Hastings dominated their depleted opponents without adding to the score-line.

After the re-start the home team kept pressing and doubled their advantage in fortuitous fashion: Max Walsh's speculative volley from a long throw by Ollie Black deflected off an Erith defender and looped high into the net. Further goals seemed sure to come, but on the contrary, Hastings' attacking powers deflated as the game drew to a close.

Winger Callum Erskine was ineffective, and none of the substitutes Ayo Olasimbo, Warren-Hugues Mfula and Kian Moynes – the latter a surprise and welcome returnee to the Pilot Field – were able to make their mark. Ten-man Erith exerted some pressure of their own, and it was indicative that United's man-of-the-match accolade was (deservedly) awarded to central defender Sam Pidgeon.

ISTHMIAN LEAGUE SOUTH EAST DIVISION
TOP FOUR AS AT 18 OCTOBER

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS
HASTINGS UNITED	11	8	1	2	26	15	25
SOUTH PARK (REIGATE)	12	7	3	2	26	14	24
ERITH TOWN	10	6	2	2	24	11	20
FAVERSHAM TOWN	11	5	4	2	26	19	19

scoring with a penalty to take an early lead. Play continued evenly, with the visitors bullying advantage in the scrums, but the teams otherwise well matched.

The boys in blue & white received their own shot at the posts after half an hour of play, allowing Tom Hirst to level the scores (3-3). Vigo then edged back in front with another penalty (3-6).

The halftime break did little to calm Hastings nerves. Hooker Joe Umpleby was forced from the field to be replaced by Max Mowbray, and play continued on the level.

However, shortly after the hour mark, the visitors extended their advantage, crossing for a try but missing the conversion attempt to move 3-11 ahead.

H&B struggled to find a way back into the contest, despite flowing open play and hard running by Calvin Crosby-Clarke and the day's captain, Fraser McManus.

Scrum half Ashton Pola was replaced by Sam Surridge, but even the multiple penalties conceded by the visitors for petty misdemeanours and repeated backchat didn't open up a scoring opportunity.

With ten minutes to play, a confusing break from a maul, during which everybody waited for a whistle that never came, led to a second Vigo try. To add insult, the passage of play also caused further head injuries both to flanker Quinn McManus and to prop Kaleb Wiggan.

With Pola and Dom Sewell returning to the field but no more replacement front rows available, the game was played with uncontested scrums for the closing minutes. Nothing came of the change, the visitors staying comfortably in front (3-18).

A frustrating afternoon for H&B in a season that couldn't have started more slowly and unsurely. The squad will wish a speedy recovery to the multiple players already on the long term injury list.

Thoughts and prayers this week also go to the family and friends of Jerry Hohenkirk, long standing club member and ex-chairman. RIP.

Bexhill, Hastings and Rother Support Group

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Saturday 24th October 2pm - 5pm

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Mark Mardell, BBC TV journalist

&

a host of 'Movers and Shakers'

a podcast about living with Parkinson's.

Talk by Mike Scott-
Lead Parkinson's Nurse Specialist
at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

2020 Taster sessions:
The ParkinSongsters

Concert by
The ParkinSongsters

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affected by Parkinson's

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