

# SUSSEX BOOKENDS

A WEEKLY CELEBRATION OF THE SUSSEX CHARACTER

Stanmer Park is classified as a local nature reserve, though you would hardly guess it as you approach the house and village up a long driveway past carefully landscaped slopes, dotted with specimen trees in the manner of 18th-century landowners intent on displaying their taste and wealth. But since 1947, when Brighton purchased the estate, we have become legatees and are thus enabled to enjoy another of the features on which earlier landowners lavished their time and money - the extensive woods, and there are three, that clothe the surrounding downs. To the north-east of the house and village is Millbank Wood; to the north-west, Upper Lodge Wood; and rising behind the house to the east is Great Wood, in which the paths are lined in places with erect, towering beech trees. Not all of these, alas, survived the great storm of 1987 that destroyed over two-thirds of Stanmer's trees. Read more in *Sussex Wildlife* by David Mortimer.

## Rough waters

Just down the coast from Eastbourne is one of the county's most famous, and dangerous, landmarks, Beachy Head.

In 1692 Jonathan Darby, a curate from Litlington, decided that a reliable fixed light was essential in order to warn men at sea of the hazards and whereabouts of this treacherous stretch of coast. He excavated 'Parson Darby's Hole' in caves

already existing near Belle Tout lighthouse. He created a chimney that led up from the coast and constructed rooms above it where he set lights on stormy nights. Sometimes he spent whole nights there himself, watching the sea.

Many lives were saved and even when ships were wrecked, some sailors were saved by being pulled to safety into Parson Darby's Hole.

## Out & About in Sussex

While walking the lovely South Downs keep your eye out for groups of small, hardy-looking ponies chomping on the grass. These are likely to be the wild Exmoor ponies that are being used to keep down the invasive tor grass (*Brachypodium pinnatum*) in various parts of the country, including Sussex.

The tor grass destroys the habitat in which special species of rare wildflowers thrive, providing food for birds and

butterflies. The sturdy Exmoor ponies, with their characteristic thick double layered coat which provides protection against the cold and rain as well as being effective camouflage, are performing a valuable environmental service. To find out more, including how you can become a volunteer warden, contact the Sussex Pony Grazing and Conservation Trust on **01323 871136**.

## Eastbourne Quiz

**1 Eastbourne's Wish Tower was originally what type of building?**

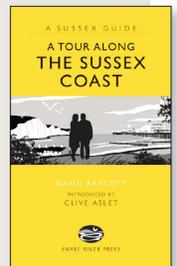
**2 Which Duke developed Eastbourne?**

**3 Where is the Redoubt?**

**4 Found on Eastbourne seafront, what is the Dotto?**

**5 What is Eastbourne's new art gallery called?**

Email your answers, along with your name and address to: [editorial@snakeriverpress.co.uk](mailto:editorial@snakeriverpress.co.uk). The sender of the first set of correct answers received wins a copy of *A Tour Along the Sussex Coast* by David Arscott worth £8.99. The correct answers will be posted at [www.snakeriverpress.co.uk](http://www.snakeriverpress.co.uk) next Saturday.



## Lost words

“ Here are some more old county words that have multiple meanings taken from *A Dictionary of Sussex Dialect* by the Reverend W. D. Parish.

**Shruck:** Shocked.

**Shruck:** Shrieked.

An old woman who was accidentally locked up in a church where she was slumbering in a high pew, said, 'I shruck till I could shruck no longer, but no one comed, so I up and tolled upon the bell.'

**Shuck:** To undress; to shell peas.

**Shuck:** A husk or pod.

**Shuck:** Unsettled; applied to the weather.

## EASTBOURNE



Eastbourne was the first British seaside resort to have its own orchestra. A plaque on the wall of the impressive 1930s bandstand (which replaced a prettier but much smaller 'birdcage' structure) honours one of its regulars, John Wesley Woodward, who was lost in April 1912 while a member of the ship's orchestra on the Titanic.

The BBC Palm Court Orchestra used to broadcast regularly from the Great Hall of the Grand Hotel. It was to the Grand that the composer Debussy scandalously fled from France in the summer of 1905 with his pregnant mistress, completing the orchestration of *La Mer* while he was there. 'The sea displays herself with a strictly British correctness,' he wrote to a friend, later describing Eastbourne as 'a little English seaside town, as ridiculous as these sort of places always are'.

Read more in *A Tour Along the Sussex Coast* by David Arscott.

## Live & learn

Jane Austen's novel *Sanditon* was left incomplete on her death in 1817. A pity for the seaside literature of Sussex, as well as for Austen-philes. Situated at an imaginary spot between Eastbourne and Hastings, *Sanditon* takes on different identities for the reader according to which character is speaking.

'...Sanditon itself - everybody has heard of Sanditon [cries the enthusiastic Mr Parker] - the favourite for a young and rising bathing-place, certainly the favourite spot of all that are to be found along the coast of Sussex - the most favoured by Nature, and promising to be the most chosen by Man.'

From *A Sussex Miscellany* by Sophie Collins, published by Snake River Press, £8.99.