

SUSSEX BOOKENDS

A WEEKLY CELEBRATION OF THE SUSSEX CHARACTER

In the peaceful churchyard of St Mary the Virgin, Horsham, lies the gravestone an 18th-century Indian woman, nicknamed 'The Black Princess'. Abandoned by her western husband in England she spent the last 50 years of her life living quietly in the heart of St Leonard's Forest.

Halima, or Sakins (1772-1853) was born to a high-class Muslim family in Lucknow, India. (She later claimed to have been a queen in her own country.) Aged 15 she married a French mercenary soldier named Benoit Leborgne. He was 22 years older and ostensibly converted to Islam in order to marry her.

After having two children and becoming very wealthy, the couple retired to England. Halima adopted the anglicised name of Helena. Benoit then married again, this time to a young aristocratic girl. He divorced his first wife who retreated to the Horsham area. Here she lived a lonely and reclusive life, a melancholic woman who sadly outlived both her children.

Miscellany Quiz

1 Which Sussex church claims to be the smallest?

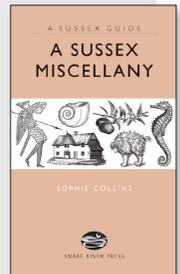
2 Where is the mouth of the River Ouse?

3 Name the architect of Eastbourne pier.

4 Is Breaky Bottom a vineyard or a brewery?

5 Which Sussex town boasts its own version of the Sistine Chapel ceiling?

Email your answers, along with your name and address to: editorial@snakeriverpress.co.uk. The sender of the first set of correct answers received wins a copy of A Sussex Miscellany by Sophie Collins worth £8.99. The correct answers will be posted at www.snakeriverpress.co.uk next Saturday.



Live & learn

In the 13th century Sussex had many anchorites - men and women who had themselves immured for life in tiny cells attached to churches, with the purpose of praying for the living outside their walls.

St Richard of Chichester made a number of bequests to specific anchorites over his life and in his will in 1253. One such was at Hardham where a wattle-and-daub structure eight feet square is recorded, with a 'narrow and convenient' window through which food was passed, and at which people could seek counsel.

The Hardham 'Anker' would serve a year's probation before being locked up for life in his cell; to the modern mind the prospect might seem hideous, but he was at least guaranteed a roof and food.

Sussex Celebrity

Leonard Woolf

1880-1969



Leonard Woolf's reputation has been overshadowed by that of his more famous wife, Virginia, and in recent years some feminist writers have tried to demonise him as a controlling male presence who actually exploited her, financially and emotionally, rather than looking after her. As her suicide note proves, this does not appear to have been her own view.

With his wife Woolf founded and ran the Hogarth Press which published such literary luminaries as T.S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield and E.M. Forster. The Village and the Jungle (1913), After the Deluge (1931-51) and Principia Politica (1953) are among the best of his own writings. Leonard Woolf was a long surviving custodian, not only of his wife's literary legacy but of Bloomsbury values. He famously said, 'Anyone can be a barbarian; it requires a terrible effort to remain a civilised man.'

Read more in Sussex Writers & Artists by Edward Lucie-Smith, illustrated by Ivan Hissey (Snake River Press £8.99).

Lost words

Here is a miscellany of old Sussex words taken from A Dictionary of Sussex Dialect by the Reverend W.D. Parish.

Cadger: Not only a travelling beggar, but anyone given to begging is called by this name in Sussex.

Higgler: A huckster; so called from higgling over his bargains.

Niff: to quarrel; to be offended.

Rusty: Unruly; ill-humoured.

Shooler: An idle, lazy fellow; described as 'a man who goes about with his boots undone.'

Tiffy: Touchy; irritable.

Out & About in Sussex

Many of the county's lovely gardens that are in the care of the National Trust are open to visitors throughout February. Don't miss the life-affirming sight of a carpet of snowdrops or the thrill of the first daffodils.

At Nymans there are not only the snowdrops in the Wall Garden but an array of sweetly-scented flowering

shrubs, as well as the reds, whites and pinks of the heather garden. Early rhododendrons and azaleas will soon be stealing the show over at Sheffield Park Garden. Visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk for visitor information.

After such a challenging winter these floral delights truly herald the coming joys of spring.

Dark art

A stunning new exhibition has just opened at Eastbourne's Towner Art Gallery. The Dark Monarch, Magic and Modernity in British Art, boasts an impressive array of artists.

Richard Dadd, Meredith Frampton, Samuel Palmer and John Piper are among those represented in the show. Also featured are Sussex favourites

Eric Ravilious and Paul Nash. The latter artist is one of the subjects of David Boyd Haycock's new book A Crisis of Brilliance, which I strongly recommend to anyone interested in early 20th-century British art.

The Dark Monarch continues until March 21. Call 01323 434670 or visit www.townereastbourne.co.uk.