



# LITERARY LIFE

A look at what's new in the Sussex book world.  
Books editor: **Angela Wintle**

In 2005, the Rev Peter Owen Jones was inducted as vicar for the combined benefice of Firle, Glynde and Beddingham in East Sussex, three wonderfully romantic, small parishes in the shade of the South Downs.

No better apostle could ever have appeared. The dashing Owen Jones, with a colourful past in advertising, Australia, travelling, Indian asceticism and Chinese Buddhism (not to mention running a mobile disco), set about vivifying Christianity in practical terms by pilgrimage. The Downs were on his doorstep.

In 2017, BBC Four commissioned him to spend a year walking the South Downs Way for a documentary called *South Downs: England's Mountains Green*, in which the irrepressible cleric rambled gustily over hill and dale, recording natural history and talking to everyone.

His new book is another pilgrimage, a solitary road trip from Cornwall to Cumbria, stopping to climb hills along the way.

In 12 days, travelling without any modern electronic media, camping cheaply and ignoring the weather, he equalled the summit of Mount Everest by scaling a combination of smaller peaks in the English countryside.

Owen Jones' determination to scour himself clean of a "life



Photo: Matt Roseveare

## Head in the clouds

Sussex vicar Peter Owen Jones reveals the personal awakening and perspective to be gained from scaling England's mighty hills. **Louise Dumas** is inspired



tainted by life insurance and sugar", and strip back to raw truth and emotional honesty through physical endurance, practical exploration and exposure to the elements, is a very appealing idea, one recently described by Olivia Laing in her Ouse quest, *To The River*. Like Laing, Owen Jones uses geography as a prop for personal nostalgia, lateral reference and immediate impressions.

The book is divided into an apostolic 12 chapters, each illustrated by atmospheric photographs and directional

details, and sparkling with memorable phrases. There are conflicts: Owen Jones' desire to strip away the protective layers of life sits uneasily with his ambition to see beauty and truth in the everyday, just as the 12 selected musical compositions he chooses to accompany each day cannot possibly be heard without the benefit of recordings.

But perhaps this is taking a preacher too literally and ignoring the wonderful wood for a quirky tree or two. It's an inspiring book. Where are your thick socks and walking boots? ♦

**ABOVE:** Peter Owen Jones taking a well-earned rest

*Everest England* by Peter Owen Jones is published by AA Publishing at £12.99.

In last month's review of *Regency Square: Its History and Its Stories* it was incorrectly stated that Brighton's Russell Square had become a car park, Bedford Square had lost out to the Holiday Inn, and Max Miller and the Duke of Albany had links with Regency Square.

These errors do not feature in the book.

# MUST-READS

## OUR CHOICE OF THE BEST NEW SUSSEX BOOKS

**My life  
in books**  
**IAN WILLIAMS**



*Ian Williams is a physician, comics artist and writer, based in Hove. He founded and co-edits the website [GraphicMedicine.org](http://GraphicMedicine.org), and his weekly comic strip, *Sick Notes*, about the trials and tribulations of working in the NHS, ran in *The Guardian* for two years. His latest graphic novel, *The Lady Doctor*, is out now (*Myriad*, £14.99).*

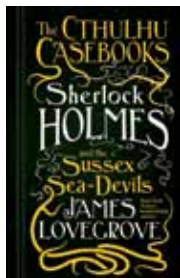
### THE CTHULHU CASEBOOKS: SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE SUSSEX SEA-DEVILS

by James Lovegrove  
(Titan Books, £12.99)

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle became so fed up with the success of Sherlock Holmes that he killed off the great detective. But more than a century later, Holmes is still finding clues and confronting villains, thanks to other authors. One of the most prolific is James Lovegrove, who has featured Holmes in five previous novels. For his latest outing, he is in sunny Sussex rather than Baker Street. Holmes has retired to a small downland farm, but as the faithful Watson relates, remains as active as ever. This time he has to contend with Sussex sea devils – strange amphibious creatures from a seabed city which come ashore every few centuries to capture young women.

The novel is action-packed, and the mysterious sea devils are Holmes' strangest adversaries yet. Conan Doyle could not help writing well even when hating Holmes. Despite his energetic prose, Lovegrove fails to match the magic of the originals.

**Adam Trimmingham**



### WILD FLOWERS OF THE HIGH WEALD

by Chris Clennett  
(Kew Publishing, £15)

Recent press reports spotlight alarming global declines in animal populations, but flora is suffering, too. A quarter of the world's plant species face possible extinction. All the more reason to value the floral diversity of our region.

The High Weald is home to 677 native and naturalised plants, including ferns and grasses. Its undulations and rocky outcrops made it tougher to farm than the softer, richer clays of its sister landscape, the Low Weald, enabling the survival of a range of plant-supporting habitats, from the remarkable ghyll woodlands around Hastings to the heaths of Ashdown Forest.

This is a toe-in-the-water style introductory guide, the 98 pages of text interspersed with photographs, a real help to beginners desperate to identify plants while out walking, or wanting to recognise different landscape types. Hardcore enthusiasts, however, will want *The Flora of Sussex*, published by the Sussex Botanical Recording Society last year.

**Jack Watkins**



### WEST SUSSEX: YEAR-ROUND WALKS

by David Weller  
(Countryside Books, £8.95)

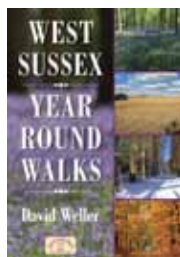
If you have confined your country walking to the warmer months, then David Weller is hoping to change your habits, arguing there is much pleasure to be gained 'off season'.

The 20 circular walks included in this collection are suitable for any time of the year, but he has divided the routes into seasons to show each at its very best, whether it be a woodland cloaked in the golden colours of autumn, the crisp views of a winter landscape, a fragrant carpet of bluebells or the lush tapestry of wildflowers in a summer meadow.

There are hikes over Harting Down, the Trundle and the South Downs Way; through the majestic woodland of Northpark Copse and Eartham Wood; and beside the peaceful waters of the Weir Wood Reservoir, the River Ouse and the Wey & Arun Canal.

What are you waiting for?

**Angela Wintle**



### THE FOLLOW

by Paul Grzegorzek  
(Killer Reads, £8.99)

This debut novel, the first featuring Brighton PC Gareth Bell, is marketed as a thriller rather than a detective story, and it's immediately clear that this is no ordinary police procedural whodunnit.

Both Bell and the reader know who the criminals are (with one notable exception in the form of a to-be-discovered traitorous colleague), but the difficulty is getting them behind bars. And the question is, how much will Bell risk to achieve that end? The answer is a surprising amount, perhaps, given that the Brighton-based author was previously a police officer in the city, working on undercover drug operations.

Despite insider knowledge occasionally weighing too heavily, the novel remains fast paced – as a thriller should – and will appeal to crime fans who prefer action and machismo to mystery and psychology.

**Anne Hill**



#### The book I loved as a child

I clearly remember my mother reading Clive King's *Stig of the Dump* to me and my brother. I especially liked the bit where Stig and Barney protect a fox which has sought sanctuary from a pack of hunting hounds in Stig's cave. Stig sends the alpha hound packing by biting its ear.

#### The book that inspired me as a teenager

Primo Levi's *The Wrench*, although I'm not sure it inspired me in the right way. It's about an itinerant rigger (an engineer who erects oil derricks and the like) who's constantly on the move and loves and leaves. He's a restless libertine and loner. I have finally – in my early 50s – had a child and got married. Enough said.

#### The book I've never finished

There are many, but let's say *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. It remains unfinished for all the reasons Viv Groskop outlines in her marvellous book, *The Anna Karenina Fix*. I did manage to get through *Crime and Punishment*, however.

#### The book that moved me most

*The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, an author who can be very funny, but not here. A bit of me died reading this gutting portrayal of abject poverty and human exploitation, but it also made me realise how fortunate I was to have been born into a loving, solvent, middle-class family in the middle of the 20th century. Things have not changed as much as we would have hoped.

#### The book I'm reading now

Philippa Perry's *The Book You Wish Your Parents Had Read (and Your Children Will be Glad That You Did)*. We have a two year old and this is helping. The title is very apt.

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