



LITERARY LIFE

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

THE BURNING CHAMBERS

by **Kate Mosse**

(Mantle, £20)

Chichester's Kate Mosse must be among the most successful authors ever to have emerged from Sussex, and heaven knows, there have been many. Since *Labyrinth*, the first in her Languedoc trilogy, hit the shelves in 2005, her novels have sold more than five million copies in 38 languages.

Now, after a brief foray into short stories and gothic crime – with *The Taxidermist's Daughter* which was based in Fishbourne in West Sussex – Mosse has produced the first heavyweight tome of what is sure to be another bestselling epic historical fiction trilogy.

The Burning Chambers is set in the south of France, firstly in Carcassonne (where Mosse has a second home), then Toulouse and Puivert, a remote village fiefdom. It is 1562 and the Wars of Religion are raging, as Catholics and Huguenots vie to defend their faith.

Catholic Minou Joubert is 19 and trying to keep her father's bookshop open after he returns from a business trip ill and strangely disinterested. Minou receives an anonymous cryptic message: "She knows that you live", bearing an unknown but distinctive family crest.

Soon afterwards, she meets Piet Reydon, a young Huguenot, who is falsely accused of a crime and needs help to escape the city. From that moment Minou's life takes a turn which will bring her to the heart of the war in Toulouse and on to greater danger as Piet's secret mission and her own unsuspected destiny converge at Puivert. Along the way the brave pair experience love, loyalty and betrayal, as family, friends and

enemies are not always who they seem to be.

There's much to enjoy in this novel, from the vivid historical setting to the trademark feisty female leads. In particular, watch out for a surprise killer blow from a most unexpected source – a marvellous touch reminiscent of Georgette Heyer.

Mosse has a knack of knitting complex narrative

strands into a recognisable whole, although some of the links strain credibility further than others and not everyone will appreciate the large cast of characters, even with the handy checklist provided.

Nevertheless, Mosse fans will no doubt devour every word. And a prologue set in 1862 South Africa hints at the sweeping panorama to come as the series continues, leading from this tale of 16th-century France through 300 years of history.



Photo: Ruth Crafer

Epic return

Kate Mosse brings 16th-century France vividly to life with a gripping story of love and betrayal, conspiracies and divided loyalties, reveals Anne Hill



ABOVE:
Chichester author
Kate Mosse

MUST-READS

OUR CHOICE OF THE BEST NEW SUSSEX NON-FICTION

UP THE DOWNS!

by **Jack Arscott**

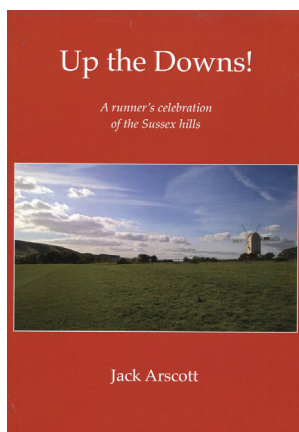
(Pomegranate Press, £7.99)

There are some folk for whom the very idea of running up and down chalk cliffs wearing shorts and a vest or hurtling over downland trails avoiding cowpats and brambles is a thing to be avoided at all costs. This is not a book for them.

It is a touch specialist, although recent attendance at marathons and Park Runs indicates a larger market than might be guessed at. This is for athletes who like to connect with nature in general and the South Downs in particular, and they exist in growing numbers.

Jack Arscott's book radiates energy and enthusiasm in equal measure. He offers helpful running tips, local histories and atmospheric photographs. He also writes in glowing terms of famous runs he has tackled and lists those he hasn't - yet. I'll look forward to seeing him at the Beachy Head start in October.

Louise Dumas



My Life in Books RUTH FIGGEST



Photo: Nicky Thomas LRPS

Ruth Figgist is a novelist and short story writer based in Eastbourne. She has had several short stories shortlisted for literary awards; another, The Coffin Gate, was broadcast on BBC Radio 4. Her debut novel, Magnetism, about a complex mother and daughter relationship, is out now (Myriad, £8.99).

The book I loved as a child

My copy of *Ant and Bee and the Rainbow* by Angela Banner has my name written inside the cover in childish handwriting. It's a very happy early-reading story about friendship and adventure that teaches children about colours and life. Isn't violet a wonderful word?

The book that inspired me as a teenager

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is the first of what became a seven-volume autobiographical work by Maya Angelou. The accurate detail in the imagery evokes place perfectly. Her authentic voice and use of language expertly illicit emotion in an understated fashion.

The book I've never finished

Donna Tartt's *The Little Friend*. I very much enjoyed her two other novels though, *The Secret History* and *The Goldfinch*.

The book that moved me most

Up A Road Slowly by Irene Hunt. It encouraged me to love books and taught me that life might be OK. I think I read it when I was about 12. It explores loss, mental health problems and alcoholism. I remember one section in which the complex emotions attached to children being cruel to each other felt particularly authentic. It made me feel less alone.

The book I'm reading now

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri is amazing. The writing is flawless and the story engaging and moving. It was recommended to me via Twitter by someone who enjoyed my writing, and I'm very grateful to have had the recommendation.

RYE HISTORY TOUR

by **Alan Dickinson**

(Amberley Publishing, £7.99)

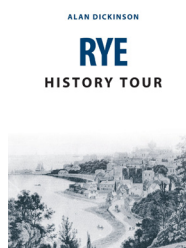
This new study is a pocket-sized version of an earlier work in Amberley Publishing's

Through Time series which presents historic and current images together to allow an exploration of continuity and change.

Readers will note that in Rye's case, architecture changes much less than fashion and transport. New material takes the reader through the town in three circular tours examining the commercial centre, hill-top castle surrounds and port.

One photograph shows an archaeological society visit in 1901. Rye has always attracted particular interest for its enduring charm, period architecture and literary and historical connections. The fact that these survive is due to its geographical location (Rye is at the confluence of three rivers), planning controls, economic decline and, in some sense, the meticulous documentation of writers such as Alan Dickinson.

Louise Dumas



EAST SUSSEX SMUGGLERS' PUBS

by **Terry Townsend**

(Halsgrove, £9.99)

Readers of Terry Townsend's many books on East Sussex

smugglers' pubs might wonder what other sort there are. It seems that most inns were commandeered by the 'gentlemen' in the 17th and 18th centuries when export duties threatened farmers and import duties were levied on tobacco, silk, brandy and tea.

Inns were a natural place to meet and an obvious store for contraband. They also served as a recruitment centre, distribution depot and valued customer.

Legends and characters became as numerous as hidden tunnels, and Townsend has enormous fun digging them out in this amply illustrated study.

Many a modern landlord is pictured happily pulling pints, perhaps unaware of the secret history beneath his feet or possibly engaged in some future legerdemain which tomorrow's historians will have as much fun as the author in uncovering.

Louise Dumas

