

## News Feature

# It's astonishing how rich the history has proved to be'

**A community celebration of Pells' centenary has been delayed until 2021 but a new history book and a bunting project, decorating the area's streets, park and swimming pool, have continued apace despite the Covid-19 lockdown.**

A community celebration, planned for the Pells area of Lewes this month, has been moved forward to next year – like the 2020 Olympics and other events affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

But work on a local history book and a bunting project to decorate the streets, park and swimming pool for a special centenary has never stopped during lockdown.

John Webber, chair of the Pells and St John's Neighbourhood Association (PSJNA) said: "We are delighted that the book will be published by Lewes History Group later this year and we hope that events will take place in 2021. Some PSJNA members were at the heart of the plans."

The celebration was conceived to commemorate the donation of a piece of land 100 years ago to the people of the town by Wynne E. Baxter, first mayor of Lewes.

His generous gift in June 1920 completed a park close to the River Ouse, which included the Pells lake, the recreation ground and the now-famous outdoor public swimming pool.

Last Sunday (June 7,) as a gesture to mark the date, bunting was hung around St John sub Castro's church hall by designer Emma Carlow and others – all keeping social distance. More than 70 people have sewn 180 pennants featuring images of ducks, bees and other wildlife, Pells landmarks.

Ideas for the centenary had been under discussion since January 2019 when a first public meeting was held at the Elephant and Castle. Suggestions included a book about the history of the Pells area, a concert at St John sub Castro church, tree trail, children's I-spy guide and a photographic exhibition.

A small committee worked and gained support from both Lewes Town Council and Mayo Wynne Baxter, the legal firm which Wynne Baxter helped found. Lewes History Group agreed to publish the book and invited authors to speak at one of their monthly meetings – which will go ahead when possible.

A 1920s-themed swimming gala was booked but, with Pells Pool shut, the event was postponed until summer 2021. Regular swimmer and Trustee of the pool's community association said: "We had made exciting plans with Phil Ransley, the pool manager, for a day of races and displays. Historic costumes,



**It's wonderful to see how many people, especially families with young children, have enjoyed the wildlife around the Pells.**

band music and synchronised swimming were scheduled too – it's disappointing, but we've got our fingers crossed for next year."

Through the lockdown, the community of seven streets and 135 houses, continued to collaborate (while safe distancing) and keep in touch through at least one WhatsApp group. Residents have been helping their neighbours through the Lewes Coronavirus Volunteer scheme.

Sarah Bayliss of Toronto Terrace, and one of the book's authors, said: "The Thursday night clap for the NHS always ended with people chatting and sharing news; people have baked bread for each other, swapped seedlings, reported bee swarms and offered to shop. Sewing proved therapeutic and the enthusiasm for making bunting has certainly grown.

**A heron has joined numerous ducklings and moorhen chicks at the Pells. Picture by John Webber.**

Pells Bunting team at St John's church hall with local residents: From left: Jane Lee, Clare Mitchison, John Webber, Emma Carlow, Mick Hawksworth, Sarah Bayliss: by Graham Carlow. Pictured right: Stitchers from the Pells bunting team: Susanna Longley and Jane Lee by Graham Carlow. Examples of the bunting by Graham Carlow. Pells Book cover: by Jane Robbins



There has definitely been a silver lining to this cloud."

Residents have also enjoyed spotting wildlife on their doorsteps. Beehives in gardens and ducklings on the lake have thrived, according to local experts. Patrick Collinson, a beekeeper of Pelham Terrace said: "May was the most wonderful month for nature and, to date, I have collected six swarms for hives where colonies died last winter. Even the ash trees seem to be flourishing. It's happening for a reason – the air is so much cleaner – and we should learn from that. We need to find a better way of living in the world."

John Webber, of Talbot Terrace and a keen photographer, said: "It's wonderful to see how many people, especially families with young children, have enjoyed the wildlife around the Pells. As well as numerous ducklings, a heron has been visiting and there have been several broods of moorhen chicks.

The book, called *The Pells of Lewes: pool, park, people and places*, has chapters written by 15 Lewes residents and will go to press soon. Ruth Thomson, co-ordinator and editor of the 160-page, full-colour book said: "It is quite astonishing how rich the history has proved to be. Contributors have traced long-gone features – from sacred springs and medieval swanneries to a paper mill and Every's Iron Works. They have explored the development of their Victorian houses, the old Pells school, the churchyard, the pub and much more. Residents, past and present and collectors too have been incredibly generous with their memories, photographs, illustrations, documents and postcards – some previously unpublished."

Neil Thomson of Pelham Terrace said: "Lockdown has brought people from all across Lewes to the Pells. The wildlife has entertained and entranced anyone walking around the lake for their daily exercise. We hope next year may allow a centenary 'plus-one' celebration to which all of Lewes will be welcome."