

Entertainment & Leisure

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'The nicest person in my book? Probably the Nazi'

By **MATTHEW WILSON**
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PADDY ASHDOWN is busy when I telephone. He's bringing his onions in from his Somerset garden and asks me to ring back.

"It's the village flower show," he explains five minutes later. "We're normally away in France at this time of year but my wife had a knee operation."

"But we're both avid gardeners, and so for the first time for several years I'm about to enter the village flower show — and sweep the board, I can tell you. You should see the size of my onions, they're huge!"

Is he entering any other categories? "All the categories," he laughs. "Beans, sweet peas, all the usual. We have a basket of vegetables, some of my wife's flowers — I think we're entering six categories. You know what village flower shows are like."

Paddy — now Lord — Ashdown, clearly knows his onions. And a lot more besides.

His success or otherwise in the village flower show is currently not known — but perhaps a *Henley Standard* reader might care to ask him how he got on when he appears at the town's literary festival later this month.

He is booked to give a talk at the Kenton Theatre at 6.30pm on Tuesday, September 27. But hurry if you want tickets — his 2014 event at the festival was a sell-out.

His festival appearance this year is well-timed, coming just five days after the publication of his latest book, *Game of Spies*, on September 22.

Set in occupied France between 1942 and 1944, this sets out to tell the story of what Ashdown calls "France's greatest betrayal".

Revolving around three men — the ruthless British secret agent Roger Landes, the Gestapo counter-espionage officer charged with finding him, Friedrich Dohse, and the aristocratic and right-wing French resistance leader André Grandclément — *Game of Spies* uncovers the bitter duel they fought in an atmosphere of collaboration, betrayal and assassination.

The book is a companion piece to Ashdown's 2012 bestseller *A Brilliant Little Operation: The Cockleshell Heroes and the Most Courageous Raid of WW2*, which told the story of Operation Frankton — the legendary December 1942 commando raid on shipping in the German-occupied port of Bordeaux.

As Ashdown explains: "It tells you what went on in Bordeaux at the time the raid took place. It gives you the background but it's a totally different story. It's about the duel between the three men — these characters that I first came across when I wrote *A Brilliant Little Operation*, and they fascinated me. This is another story about derring-do. It's a story about courage, certainly, but also human



Jacket on: Paddy Ashdown's new book *Game of Spies* is out later this month

relationships and betrayal and love affairs and all of those things — all the things that go on in these circumstances.

Let us not forget, Ashdown's own military career saw him serve with the Royal Marines, for whom he commanded a company in Belfast. He was an officer in the Special Boat Service, later joining MI6 as an intelligence officer.

Factor in his 11 years as leader of the Liberal Democrats from 1988 to 1999 and you realise that Ashdown must have seen plenty of human nature in extremis.

As he puts it: "Espionage is conducted amongst ordinary people and ordinary lives. The really important part of this book is how three people reacted — not to great events but to the backwash of great events. Almost everything is counterintuitive. I mean, arguably the nicest man in the book is the Gestapo officer. He doesn't kill anybody at all. Whereas almost everybody else..." Ashdown laughs gently.

"He doesn't torture anybody either. He takes them out for lunch to get them to talk. Very, very clever counterintelligence operator, a very cultivated man and the person who defeated the British secret agent Roger Landes — probably the greatest secret agent we had in France, but he's utterly ruthless, utterly focused, he's going about his business but also extremely clever. I mean cunning more than clever."

In the introduction to *Game of Spies*, which was written in collaboration with Sylvie Young, Ashdown explains that what gave the

book lift-off, so to speak, was the astonishing revelation that Dohse had written a memoir — and that the papers were lodged in the Bordeaux archives.

"We discovered it through an academic," recalls Ashdown. "He said 'These exist and it would be nice to dig it out.' We realised what we had — a great discovery which enabled me to trace these three men's lives almost on a daily basis. No memoirs of a Gestapo agent have ever been discovered — it's the only memoirs of a Gestapo agent even written."

As Ashdown tells it, it's only the brute willingness to do the digging around that makes possible the sort of books he wants to write.

"I always look to spend probably two years on each book delving through archives. I'm fascinated by making history live — but also making sure it's totally accurate and in finding those little tiny bits of information that other people can't find.

"I'm just starting my next one now, probably, and it will take me two or three years of research in the French archives and in this case the German archives — and a lot in the British archives in Kew, of course."

Ashdown may be every inch the historian these days, but he's far from living in the past.

At the end of July, a month on from the referendum on UK membership of the European Union, Ashdown was one of the co-founders of MoreUnited.uk — billed as a liberal and progressive cross-party political movement. A clue to his thinking comes on only the second



page of *Game of Spies*, where he writes: "Looking back today, it seems to me extraordinary that our besieged little country committed so many of its young men and women and so many of its resources to secret and extremely hazardous operations to free the countries of Europe, which we have now chosen to be no part of."

Is that not rather a blunt way of reading the EU referendum vote?

"I register my dismay at how far this country has come, you know, from a country that the rest of Europe looked to for liberation and which reached out into Europe to a country that has retreated, I think, into something with a spirit of isolationism, even if it's not isolationism. And I find that very sad.

"I think there can be no doubt that our relationship with Europe will be different and will be weaker. We may compensate for that — I would start with stronger relationships elsewhere in the world, if that's possible.

"But no one will doubt, I think, in Britain or indeed in Europe, that Britain's engagement in Europe — in the continent — is weakened as a result of Brexit.

"Now look, this is not in any way to try and revisit the Brexit decision — the decision's been taken and I believe it will now be carried through. It will be up to everybody who's a democrat and a patriot to accept that decision, as I do, and then try to build out of it the best we can.

"But I'm not going to pretend that I think the best we can build out of that is as good as it would have been if we'd have stayed in. Which is much more, it seems to me, in our tradition — and the book shows that."

Tickets for Paddy Ashdown at the Kenton Theatre on September 27 are £12.50. To enquire about availability, call the Henley Literary Festival box office on (01491) 575948 between 10am and 4pm on weekdays or visit www.henleyliteraryfestival.co.uk

Tea, cake and a great selection of cinema

FILM fans are looking forward to the cinematic half of the Henley Fringe and Film Festival — which takes place at the Regal Picturehouse in Boroma Way this weekend.

Showing this year are eight hours of short films from around the world and a locally produced feature film called *Tea + Cake*.

It is this which is opening the festival at 8.30pm tomorrow (Saturday).

Written and directed by Kirsty Robinson, with a running time of 93 minutes, the film is a coming of age story spanning four generations of women whose lives are intertwined in a small town in England.

Relationships end, insecurities are faced, dreams are pursued and dashed, but one constant in their lives is the strength they gain from each other, their friendships and family.

For her work on *Tea + Cake*, Kirsty Robinson was nominated for talented new director and best story at the 2016 International Filmmaker Festival of World Cinema.

The film has so far won best international feature at the SENE Film Festival, best narrative feature at the Geneva Film Festival, and a merit award for women filmmakers at Indie Fest. It was also the first runner-up for best feature at the Green Bay Film Festival.

Kirsty has worked in the film industry for the past 10 years and more recently in television. During any spare time she has she creates, writes and directs films.

While working at the independent production company Shoebox Films as creative executive Kirsty made *Tea + Cake*, which she calls her first "very low budget feature film" and which she started writing at the age of 14.

Having previously held jobs with Working Title Films and Shoebox Films for Paul Webster, Joe Wright and Guy Heeley, she now works in



Creative: *Tea + Cake* writer and director Kirsty Robinson

the development department at Hat Trick Productions.

On Sunday the festival continues with two screenings — at 10am and 7.30pm, both of which offer just under two hours of short films from around the world but with a big emphasis on local film productions.

Billed as "a great selection of short films from comedy to sci-fi to animation", the evening session will open with a question and answer session with Kirsty Robinson on the subject of "Making your first feature".

This will be followed by screenings of *Human*, *Dragon*, *Double Cross*, *Mouse*, *Deirdre* and *Touch*.

Festival organiser Jo Southwell said: "We are delighted to show *Human* starring local actress Nadia Lamin of Gillotts School and The Henley College. Only this week *Human* has won best film at the Los Angeles CineFest."

Among the expected highlights of the morning session is beach drama *Footprints in the Sand* by Bracknell-based filmmakers Clive Elkington and Alex Harvey-Brown.

The other films screening at 10am are *Pushing Away*, *The Night Has Opened*, *The Grave*, *Stealing* and *I Did*.

Tickets are £10 for the Saturday evening screening and £9 for the Sunday morning and evening screenings. Weekend passes are also available, priced £26. To book via Eventbrite, visit www.henleyfringe.org

Literary festival has lots on for children

A RANGE of children's events will be held as part of this year's 10th annual Henley Literary Festival.

From workshops and storytellings to events with Nadiyah Hussain and Judith Kerr, there will be something for all ages to enjoy.

Children's events take place over the weekend of Friday, September 30 to Sunday, October 2.

Royal cake-baker and *Bake Off* winner Hussain will be in conversation with *Newsround* host Leah Boleto in a special family event around her new book *Bake Me A Story*.

The Tiger Who Came to Tea and *Mog* creator Judith Kerr makes her Henley debut at 93, while BBC historian Lucy Worsley returns with her first book for older children, *Eliza Rose*. For younger children, both Kipper and Maisy will be making appearances.

Tom Percival, Michelle Robinson, Chloe Inkpen, Salvatore Rubbino and Rob Biddulph are among the top authors and illustrators with new picture books at the festival, while the Kenton Theatre plays host to a Supertato show and a

celebration of Roald Dahl in the centenary year of his birth.

A Harry Potter event invites families for an interactive hour of spells, potions and Quidditch.

Creative writing workshops are also being run throughout the weekend. *One Show* nature expert Mike Dilger will be introducing families to *The Wildlife In Your Garden*.

The festival takes place at venues across the town from Monday, September 26 to Sunday, October 2, with speakers including Jonathan Trott, Sara Pascoe, Robert Harris, Wilko Johnson and Miriam Gonzalez Durantez.

Tickets for the festival can be booked by calling (01491) 575948 between 10am and 4pm on weekdays or online at www.henleyliteraryfestival.co.uk

Author's take on pleasures and pitfalls of e-publishing

BERKSHIRE author Tim Walker will share his experience — and secrets — of e-publishing and self-publishing later this month.

He will be giving a talk on the pleasures and pitfalls of the modern author's life at The Barns at Southbrook, Hambleden, on Thursday, September 22, at 7.30pm.

With a background in newspaper publishing and degrees in communication studies and marketing, Tim is no stranger to the world of print.

A denizen of Datchet, the river Thames was the inspiration for his first book of 15 short stories, called *Thames Valley Tales*.

He has since published his first

novel, *Devil Gate Dawn*, set 10 years in the future but very topical in this post-EU referendum era — depicting as it does an ageing King Charles shuffling the country through social upheaval, with George Osborne battling terrorists.

A short story by Tim called *Murder at Henley Regatta* was published in the anthology *Fresh Ink*.

His current project is an historical fiction series, *A Light in the Dark Ages*, based in England between AD 410 and 500. *Abandoned*, the first part of this series, is already published.

Tim will share his experiences of the mysterious world of self-publishing with fellow writers and throw light on the world of e-publishing with Amazon. He hopes that his experience and

inside information will save would-be writers much in the way of potential heartache and headaches along the way.

His talk promises to be of special interest to writers, but his engaging manner and current writing interest mean that an evening with Tim Walker is a must for anyone who enjoys a good yarn and would like to learn more about his work.

Admission to Tim's talk is £5, to include light refreshments. Attendees are asked to book tickets in advance by emailing info@barnsgalleries.co.uk or calling (01491) 579989.

Tim will have some of his books on sale on the night, which he will be happy to sign. For more information, visit www.timwalkerwrites.co.uk



On the write track: Tim Walker