

TWO **BIG** OUTDOOR SUMMER EVENTS

Village Fete
2pm Sunday
28 June See page 6
for details

**Antiques &
Craft Fair**
1 August See page 7
for details

New life for Royal Oak

Neighbours step in to save pub

A new era in the long history of the village pub is under way. The official opening on 9 June means the Oak is serving drinks and food for the first time in more than a year.

New owners Aldo and Deborah Esposito want to restore the pub to its former role as a hub for the community. They promise a warm welcome, a place for villagers to meet, traditional pub food and a new daytime café for hot drinks and snacks.

The couple know the Oak – their home is opposite – and the village, having lived in Whatlington for since 1999.

They also know the hospitality business, running two successful Italian restaurants in Hastings.

"We understand how important the pub is to the village," says Aldo. "We want to take it back to its roots, to be a place where everyone can pop in for a drink or a meal and meet other villagers.

"Whether you are coming for a coffee or a three-course meal we treat everybody the same. Everyone is welcome."

Read the full story on pages 2-3

Police object to naturist camp plan

Police have objected to the controversial application for a Mill Lane naturists' camping site to increase the number of days a year it can operate.

It follows an allegation that a child passing the Mill Farm site witnessed a sex act between two campers – a claim being investigated by the police.

The site's owners want to extend the annual operation of the site from 60 days to seven months.

Whatlington Parish Council has complained to the chief executive of Rother District Council

Continues page 5

Pies, events, seven-day opening, the return of Harveys . . . and a taste of Italy

Opening hours The new café will open at 8.30am and the pub will be serving customers from 10am. The kitchens will be closed from 3-5.30pm each day. Initially the pub and café will be closed on Mondays while the team assesses operations and staffing, but the aim is to open seven days a week.

Events The Oak will once again become a venue for quizzes, live music and other community events.

The name

The pub will continue to be known as the Royal Oak but the business running from it will be called the Oak and Olive – a blend of English and Italian heritage – and this will be reflected on the sign outside.

Food The menu celebrates hearty British classics, from pies and fish and chips to grilled dishes, prepared with a focus on quality and local ingredients. Alongside this there will be a modern European influence, including a selection of pasta dishes, pizzas, fresh salads, and signatures such as zucchini fritte. Designed to be relaxed and versatile, it's perfect for a

light snack, a casual bite, or a full family meal.

Harveys returns Harveys, the local favourite ale from the Lewes-based brewery, will make its return to the Oak after being replaced by Shepherd Neame beers after it bought the pub from Margaret Fleisher and David Coupe in 2006.

The sign The new pub sign is based on previous artwork that hung from the pub before it was blown down during the Great Storm of 1987. It flew across the A21 and landed in the garden of parish council chair Roger Fisher. In another link to the past Deborah discovered that the old sign, which can be seen hanging inside the building, had been painted by a close friend of her father.



Behind the bar Kat Cmokova, who previously worked as the restaurant manager at La Bella Vista, will take on the role of pub manager. She will have support from the management teams of both La Bella Vista and La Delizia and the chef will also come from the existing team. There has been no shortage of local people hoping to fill other posts with Aldo saying he had been inundated with applications.

Villagers hope for return to the glory days

Charlotte Moore, village historian

"I'm delighted that the Oak is reopening. No one knows how long it's been a pub, but it's mentioned as an established hostelry in documents relating to the building of the 'New Road' (aka the A21) two centuries ago. It was also used as a court room – for inquests, for example – in Victorian times, and in my 1960s childhood it hosted the Christmas Pageant. The long room to the left was then a stable, so that's where we angels huddled round the crib, waiting for Mary, Joseph and the donkey to arrive."

Mike Tapsfield, Oak regular for 40 years

"I moved to Whatlington with my late wife 40 years ago and I have been a Royal Oak regular ever since. It was a busy pub especially on a Friday evening when darts and shove halpenny matches were in full swing. The Young Farmers and Round Table held their meetings there and locals would gather around the bar. I am sure that now the Oak is again a free

house, the team will restore our local to its former glories."

Roger Fisher, Chair, Whatlington Parish Council

"The reopening of the Royal Oak is a welcome return for our parish and parishioners who, I hope, will support the use of this essential village asset as a social hub. Personally I look forward to many more happy hours there. Thank you to Aldo and Deborah for this rebirth of the inn. It will deliver many benefits commercially, socially and to community wellbeing."

Steve Turner, Chair, Whatlington Connectors

"Until its closure we held many successful events at the Oak, such as quizzes and a carol concert. These showed just how important the pub is to our community. Aldo and Deborah have a vision of returning the Oak to its former status as a hub for local people to meet and it's one that we, as well as the rest of Whatlington, would heartily share."

'Silly offer' that helped save the Royal Oak

"Make a silly offer." That was Aldo Esposito's suggestion to his wife Deborah when they read in the Whatlington News that the village pub was on the market.

The couple had longed dreamed about owning the Oak, which is literally opposite their home, but their initial offer was not accepted by owners Shepherd Neame.

However, shortly afterwards the selling agents got back in touch to discuss the offer. A price was agreed and the couple are now working to restore the pub to its former popularity.

They have the best hospitality track record of any recent hosts, owning two highly successful restaurants: the fine dining Italian eatery La Bella Vista in St Leonards and the La Delizia delicatessen and eatery in Hastings Old Town.

And while they promise some Italian influences on the Oak menu, essentially it will be "a traditional English country inn offering good pub food" says Deborah.

They are not planning any major changes to the pub interior, limited in any event by its Listed status, but there are some innovations in the pipeline.

The barn function room will, during the day, become a café serving hot drinks and sweet and savoury snacks, acting as extra restaurant space on busy nights.

The former office at the Whatlington Road end of the main pub is being turned back into a snug, connected to the rest of the bar but ideal for small meetings and family gatherings or a more intimate meal.

"We want the Oak to become a hub for the village community once again," says Aldo, who moved to the UK from Sorrento nearly 40 years ago to join his brother working at the Brickwall Hotel in Sedlescombe.

"We know how important the pub is to the village. We want to take it back to its roots, to



be a place where everyone can pop in for a drink or a meal and meet other villagers – whether you are coming for a coffee or a three course meal everybody is welcome.

"Of course it needs to be a viable business and has to attract customers from a much wider area so we will be marketing it mainly via social media."

A video of Aldo talking about plans for the pub and published on The Sussex World website had attracted more than 60,000 views within days.

The couple have been heartened by the positive response they've had so far from villagers but Deborah admits: "We are not blind to the fact that reviving and running a pub is not going to be easy. We know that some of the things we try will be liked and others won't, but we will open the doors and give it a go. We don't give up easily."

"This is not going to be a posh restaurant," says Aldo. "It will be good pub food plus, of course, some Italian options. We will be family friendly and dog friendly."

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Police cite safeguarding concerns

From page 1

about the authority's handling of the application, which was submitted in January and still without a decision as Whatlington News went to print.

Now Inspector Simon Whitehead of the Rother Neighbourhood Policing Team has objected to the application in a statement to planners saying: "I, on behalf of Sussex Police, do not support this planning application due to concerns regarding the safeguarding of children and young people in the area.

"An outstanding investigation indicates that issues relating to public safety have not been adequately addressed, particularly in a location

Sex-crazed nudists are running wild and the authorities decline to act

The camping site controversy saw Whatlington the centre of a short-lived media frenzy sparked by a Telegraph article written by the paper's former editor Charles Moore, whose family home is in the village. It was followed by reports in the Daily Mail, The Sun and comments on social media.

where there is a significant likelihood of children being present."

Councillor Simon White told last month's parish council meeting the fact Rother's planning team had done nothing about the allegation, which

occurred 10 months ago, despite its safeguarding role was "an absolute disgrace".

Agent Graham Fifield for the site's owners said: "The parish council appears to be implying that because of the part of society people using the site belong to the likelihood of a crime being permitted is increased.

"What occurred could have happened at any camp site however occupied or any open air event.

"As soon as the applicant was made aware of the of what had occurred the two people were instructed to leave the site immediately."

Clr White also told the meeting he calculated that the site's existing permission to open on 60 days a year expired on 1 March but the owners were advertising future events.

He said: "It is not operating on a legal basis so why doesn't Rother enforce the site's closure? The law is the law."

The application drew objections from several Whatlington residents, many concerned at the possible increase in traffic on narrow, unmade Mill Lane.





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This year's Village Fete will be held earlier than in recent years, on Sunday 28 June from 2pm in the field by the Village Hall.

The decision to move away from the end of August has been taken by the hall committee to catch the early summer sun (hopefully!) and kick off the holiday season with something for everyone.

Come and join the fun of the dog show, tug of war, games for all ages, produce stalls, teas, coffees and cakes, a bar and BBQ.

You can get active trying to splat the rat, smashing crockery or joining the tug-of-war, or browse the craft, flowers and garden produce stands.

Or maybe you just fancy spending time with neighbours and family over a savoury or sweet treat.

■ If you want to have your own stall at the fete or would like to volunteer to lend a hand contact Linda Walker, chair of the committee, on 07730 821743.

DIARY DATE
The Twilight
Serenade will be in
the Village Hall on
Saturday 26
September



Whatlington Village
Summer Fete
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from 2pm

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Steve on
07941 669678

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Bake Book
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A book of village baking recipes is being compiled to raise money for charity. If you have a favourite cake recipe or other sweet treat you'd like to share please send it to info@whatlington.com Money raised from the sale of the book will go to the Willow Tree Children's Support for young people in Rother affected by family illness or bereavement.

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ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH

Kind support during my hospital stay

We celebrate St Barnabas on 11 June – one of the early Christians remembered as a great encourager. His name means ‘son of encouragement’, a title given to him because of his kindness, generosity and support for others.

Encouragement is something we all need from time to time. Whether we are facing exams, interviews, new challenges, or major life events such as births, marriages or bereavements, having people around us who care and support us makes a great difference.

This spirit of support was especially clear to

By Rev John Hawkins
Rector, Whatlington Church



me when I spent the bank holiday weekend in hospital having my appendix removed. While I was away, many people stepped in to help and keep things running smoothly, and I was very grateful for all the kindness shown.

I am now recovering well, although under strict instructions not to lift anything heavier than a pint of milk or, as I prefer to say, a pint of ale!

As a community, we all benefit when we look out for one another and make use of the places that bring us together. May we continue to encourage and support each other in the spirit of St Barnabas.

Pub future depends on people supporting it

It is wonderful to see our village pub reopening. In rural communities like ours, places such as the pub, church and village hall are far more than just buildings.

They are places where people meet, talk, support one another and help combat loneliness. Over the years we have lost important local services such as the post

office, village shop and school, so it is especially important that we value and support the amenities we still have.

The pub is not only an important social space, but also a valuable part of the local economy. It nearly disappeared altogether, and its future now depends on people using and supporting it.



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Saints come marching in for annual flower festival

Over the weekend of 18-19 July Whatlington Church will celebrate its Patronal Saint, Mary Magdalene, with its traditional Flower Festival. This year the theme will be 'Saints'. All are welcome to take part. Setting up will be on Friday 17th during the afternoon. If you cannot manage a floral display,

but are able to contribute flowers or foliage, these would be most welcome.

The church will be open over the weekend between 10am and 4pm and will conclude with a Songs of Praise service at 6pm on Sunday ■ For more information or offers of help please contact Fran on 07825 405355

Join walk to see orchid displays

An impressive display of orchids and other wild flowers is promised in a guided woodland walk open to all.

Organised by the Battle Ramblers it will take place on Friday 19 June at 4pm, starting in the Forestry England car park at Footland Woods.

The 3.5 mile circular route, with an optional extra mile for those feeling up to it, will take in Barnes Wood and should ensure walkers see displays of colourful orchids and other flowers.

To take part call 07837 769192 to register. Dogs welcome but must be kept on a short lead.

Hospice open gardens

St Michael's Hospice garden hosts are busy preparing their plots for visitors this month. The June openings are:

Battle, Saturday 13 June

Winchelsea and Rye Harbour,

Saturday 20 June

Bexhill Old Town, Tuesday 30 June

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Detectorist in search of new treasure

While at work Chris Connick can be found looking skywards to find the exact position to capture TV channels from satellites.

But in his spare time his focus is often on the ground beneath his feet.

The aerial and wi-fi expert is a keen metal detectorist, combing the fields for ancient artefacts . . . and he's looking for new sites to explore.

Chris, of Whatlington Road, took up the hobby around 15 years ago and among his finds are Roman coins, gold and silver rings including one in the shape of a starfish, a George IV gold sovereign, a Charles I hammered coin from 1625 and a William III love token – a coin bent into an S-shape as a sign of affection for a loved one.

Musket balls and lead bullets also figure among his haul along with 'spendables' – today's dropped and lost currency.

However, he says, it's not the hope of financial gain – although discovering a Saxon hoard worth millions would be life-changing – that maintains his interest.

"It's the excitement of not knowing what you might find and, when you do, imagining how it got there, who owned it and what their lives were like.

"I find it fascinating – unearthing something with a direct link stretching back hundreds of years."

Detecting equipment varies in sophistication but in general will signal the type of metal it has detected and, therefore, a clue to its value.

It's fairly easy to use, says Chris, however, strict rules govern the pastime.

"You can't just go onto to anybody's land and start searching. You need the permission of the landowner and the value of any significant find needs to be split 50-50.

"You should have insurance through the



Chris and, right, some of his finds

■ If you have land you'd be happy to allow Chris and his detecting partner to search then get in touch by emailing chriscconnick1@hotmail.com



The Detectorists TV series, starring writer Mackenzie Crook and Toby Jones as two misfit metal detecting buddies, has earned cult status and legions of devoted fans.

It follows the pair as they comb the fields as part of the oddball and geeky group of characters who form the Danebury Metal Detecting Club.

And it's frighteningly true to life, admits Chris, as the members spend their time uncovering drink can ring-pulls or stage talks about the buttons they have found.

National Council for Metal Detecting, which also licenses detectorists. You must also leave the land as you found it, carefully replacing the turf you have removed, and be respectful of the countryside and honest with the landowners."

Aside from the pleasure of finding treasure the hobby is also therapeutic, he says, being outdoors mainly in the countryside, close to nature, often in tranquil settings.

Until that hoard of gold coins is unearthed Chris will continue going out in most weathers with his eyes on the ground . . . unless he's searching for satellites.

Symbolism at the O&O

F As with all locals, I am very much looking forward to the re-opening of our village pub. I am glad that Aldo and Deborah will be keeping the old pub name and the choice of The Oak and Olive comes laden with symbolism.

There is the strong link with the Bible. The name represents the old and the new: the word oak only appears in the Old Testament most famously in Gideon's Call (Judges 6:11) where an Angel appeared while he was threshing wheat under an oak tree.

The tree was located in Ophrah suggesting the new Royal Oak will be a place of lively chat and conversation.

On the other hand, the olive is often mentioned in the New Testament and is linked to Christ's betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane (meaning olive press) and His ascension from the Mount of Olives.

However, the story that St Mary Magdalene was a repentant 'fallen woman' was invented by Pope Gregory I with no biblical support and the Mary who anointed His feet with olive oil was almost certainly an entirely different Mary.



Here is the coat of arms of Hungary just after the First World War, a good sign for the hungry customers of the O&O (boom!).

Yet there is more! Aldo and Deborah's surname is Esposito. The origin is believed to be from the Latin word *expositus* which leads to the verb *exponere* meaning 'to expose' or 'to place outside'.

History suggests the surname was sometimes given to foundlings who were handed over to an orphanage (an *ospizio degli esposti* or 'hospice of the exposed').

They were called *espositi* because they would be abandoned and exposed in a public place. Some orphanages maintained a *ruota degli esposti* (wheel of the exposed) where abandoned

Martyn Hole welcomes the reopening of the village pub looks for signs of success in its name



children could be left, just as our beloved pub was left abandoned.

So with the wheel, two further Whatlington connections:

Here (left) is the crest



of St Catherine's, Cambridge, founded in 1473 so any 1490 Catz students could have enjoyed a pint at the Royal Oak and this leads on to Guy Fawkes and the Catherine Wheel firework. By the way, she was beheaded, not spun.

Here (left), an heraldic water wheel which links us to grain mills hence Mill Lane and the Mill House.



One final point: King Charles was advised to hide in the oak in Boscobel Wood by Colonel

William Careless, a Royalist officer who joined the king in the tree. Surely allowing the pub to close was a careless decision?



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