

The Seaweed Shop
Becky Beasley

Music: Ted Versicolor
Copy editor: Rosie Haward
Research assistant: Kelly Morgan
Design: Sara De Bondt

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Thanks to Tim and Susan at Wow and Flutter for their ongoing enthusiasm for the project. Also to Playne Design, upstairs at 8 Trinity Street.

Thanks also to Haeckels, Margate, whose environmentally and ethically impeccable seaweed products and packaging and design philosophy were so inspiring to my research. A pop-up shop collaboration, which did not come to fruition this year, was discussed. Do visit them when you are in Margate. www.haeckels.co.uk

Thanks to Kevin Graal for Mrs Smout's genealogy.

IMAGE CREDITS

Cover: *Votes for Women* badges

- Whitehead & Hoag Co., (1910s). *Votes for Women*. [badge] Available at: www.buttonmuseum.org/buttons/votes-women [Accessed 10 Aug. 2018].
- Suffrage Pioneers 1918–2018, (2017—18). *Women's Suffrage*. [badge] Available at: www.suffrage-pioneers.net/the-list/margaret-hills [Accessed 10 Aug. 2018].

Fig. 1 – Pollard, R. (2018). *All Posts*. [online] Richard Pollard, Hastings Historian and Author. Available at: www.richardpollard.co.uk/posts/ [Accessed 9 Aug. 2018].

Fig. 2 – Gatty, M. (1872). *British Sea-Weeds*. London: Bell and Daldy, p. 214.

Fig. 3 – Pollard, R. (2018). *Hastings in Old Pictures 5*. [online] Richard Pollard, Hastings Historian and Author. Available at: www.richardpollard.co.uk/hastings-in-old-pictures-5-coming-soon/ [Accessed 9 Aug. 2018].

Fig. 4 – *Holy Trinity Church*. [photograph] Hastings Library, Hastings. (date unknown)

Fig. 5 – Pollard, R. (2018). *Hastings in Old Pictures 4*. [online] Richard Pollard, Hastings Historian and Author. Available at: www.richardpollard.co.uk/hastings-in-old-pictures-4/ [Accessed 9 Aug. 2018].

Fig. 6 – (30 March, 1912). *The Hastings and St Leonards Observer*. [newspaper]. Available at: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk [Accessed 9 Aug. 2018] © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.

Fig. 7 – *Crowds in Trinity Street*. [photograph] Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, Hastings. (date unknown)

Opposite: Seaweed shop advert: (1870–1900) *A Seaweed Shop in Hastings*. [advert] Available at: www.digital-memory.hastingspier.org.uk/content/catalogue_item/seaweed-shop-hastings [Accessed 10 Aug. 2018]. High resolution advert image Ion Castro: www.historichastings.co.uk

BECKY BEASLEY (b. 1975) is an artist who lives and works in Hastings, England. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions internationally including: Tate Britain, Serpentine Gallery Pavilion (live work), Spike Island, Leeds City Art Gallery, Towner Art Gallery, Rowse (Steinhardt, NYU) New York, South London Gallery (live work) and skuc Gallery, Ljubljana. Group exhibition participation includes three Arts Council Collection touring exhibitions, *In a dream you saw a way to survive and you were full of joy*, curated by Elizabeth Price; *British Art Show 7: In The Days of the Comet and Structure and Material* (with Claire Barclay and Karla Black).

Her work has been reviewed in the New York Times, Artforum, Art Monthly, Frieze, Art Review and Flash Art International. She is represented by Plan B Gallery, Berlin and Francesca Minini, Milan. www.beckybeasley.com

TED VERSICOLOR, a.k.a Nick Weekes, is a Hastings-based musician, sound artist and member of the local bands, Warrior Squares and Column 258. He is known for his unusual instruments made from tree branches and found objects. His album, *Sewer Songs* is a soundscape evoked by Romney Marsh and its marsh sewers – in particular Jury's Gut at Camber – which all run to the sea. The whole marsh was seabed before it was reclaimed. Rockpool Outros is a special remix for this project of one of these tracks. www.tedversicolor.bandcamp.com

WOW AND FLUTTER is a shop selling second-hand records, books, comics and art. We opened in December 2014, inspired by a shared love of music and art, and a long-standing commitment to all sorts of collecting. We love independent music, comics and Japanese toys, and our shop is full of interesting and unusual things. The name Wow And Flutter is one of our favourite Stereolab songs and also refers to the measurement of playback variations in rotary audio devices. www.wowandflutterhastings.com

ROSIE HAWARD is a writer who lives between Amsterdam and Hastings. She writes about bodies, sexuality and the sea. Her work has recently appeared in *Klüttenband* for NEVERNEVERLAND at De Punt, Amsterdam (2017), and *Something is about to happen* at De School, Amsterdam (2018), and she has written for 3 of Cups Press and *Orlando* magazine (forthcoming). She also co-hosts the podcast *Textual Feelings* with Matty Hemming, on which they discuss queer and feminist books. www.rosiehaward.info

Visitors are invited to visit

THE SEAWEED SHOP,

8, TRINITY STREET, HASTINGS.
(Opposite Trinity Church).

OCEAN FLOWERS,
Real Seaweed Ornaments for Cabinet, Bracket, and Wall Decoration, Dress Trimmings, Sprays, &c.
EVERLASTING TABLE DECORATIONS.
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL.

SEA SHEETS AND CORALS
From all parts of the world.
Marine Curiosities—Euplectellas, Gorgonias, Sponges, Crustaceans, Echinoderms, &c., &c.

THE PATENT DEWDROP CURTAINS.
(TRADE MARK.)
Resembling a shower of iridescent Dewdrops. Marvellous color effects; must be seen to be realized.
Most beautiful decoration for Hall or Drawing Room.

LATEST NOVELTY: THE DEWDROP LAMP SHADE.
An elegant combination of Beads, Thread and Silk.

Among the attractions of Hastings which should on no account be missed by visitors are the Seaweed Decorations manufactured here. The idea of thus using seaweed is original, and for years baffled all endeavours to carry out, but at last, by a happy chance, success was obtained, and now seaweeds rival flowers in their varied beauty, and have such lasting properties that a bouquet of these sea flowers lasts two or three years without attention or trouble of any kind.

They can be used as dress trimmings, table decorations, drawing room ornaments, and in innumerable other ways. For yacht decorations they are simply invaluable.

As a speciality to Hastings, being manufactured in this town, they are exceedingly suitable for presents, and are always highly prized.

Here, also, are to be seen wonders of the deep on all sides – shells, corals, sponges, gorgonias, &c., grouped about in artistic confusion, altogether forming such a place of interest that no visitor should miss going to see. The proprietor is always pleased to show and explain his collections to visitors. It remains only to add that this interesting shop is in Trinity Street, close by Trinity Church.



BECKY BEASLEY



THE

SEAWEED

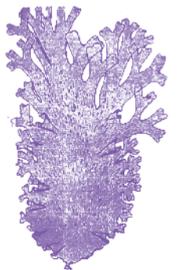
SHOP



FEATURING
TED VERSICOLOR

FORMER
SUFFRAGETTE
HEADQUARTERS
(1911-12)

MRS SMOUT'S
SEAWEED SHOP
(1882-90)



WOW & FLUTTER

RECORDS BOOKS ART COMICS AND COFFEE (SINCE 2014)

8 TRINITY STREET, HASTINGS.

THE SEAWEED SHOP

This project began with a newspaper cutting I received in the post from my dad a couple of years ago. It was a short letter to a national newspaper that referred to a Victorian seaweed florist at 8 Trinity Street, Hastings. Under the cutting, in his scrawling handwriting: ‘Your next project??? Ha, ha! Love dad’.

The Seaweed Shop was owned by Mrs Smout and located at 8 Trinity Street, from 1882 to 1890.¹ It later served as a suffragette headquarters in the period between November 1911 and June 1912, and is now the record shop Wow and Flutter.²

This research-led project reflects firstly on this unusual shop in the context of the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods. Victorian women increasingly enjoyed beachcombing for algae as an activity related to botanical illustration and flower-pressing, and in October 1843 an English botanist and photographer named Anna Atkins self-published her cyanotype photographs in *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*. It is considered to be the first book illustrated with photographic images, and went on to be a ten year project, recording the visual complexity of British algae in three volumes.



Fig. 1

Five years later, in 1848, a Margaret Gatty suffered from a bronchial condition following the birth of her seventh child, and it was suggested that a spell at the seaside might restore her health. She convalesced in Hastings for several months and took up the then fashionable pursuit of beachcombing, going on to write about the experience – one that she called life-changing – in one of her improving tales, *The Dull Watering-Place*. She subsequently became a leading expert on algae, and in 1872 her book *British Sea-Weeds* was published, an illustrated field guide to local algae detailing two hundred specimens in two volumes.

For this Coastal Currents project Gatty’s lively illustrations have been cross-referenced with algae local to Hastings today. This cross-referencing involved research into the historical

names for different species of algae. One example of this is *Dilsea carnosus*, often referred to as the ‘poor man’s weather-glass’ or ‘the sea belt’, which, in *British Sea-Weeds* (see plate 214 Gatty), is called *Iridaea Edulis*. And, in tracing these changes catalogued by Atkins and Gatty, my attention was drawn to how this naming and re-naming process is integral to the science of plant classification and its historical development.

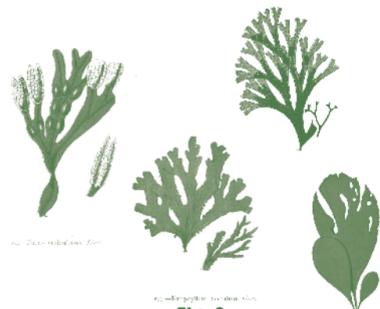


Fig. 2

My own method of research tends towards digression, but also to a kind of circling around a subject, a way of looking at something from many directions or orientations. Often, my research subjects – here 8 Trinity Street – share a nature which tends towards inhabiting the periphery, and are therefore clearer when seen on the edge of vision, like looking at the stars at night.

Consequently our research followed a number of strands, and I went in search of historic photographs of the Trinity Street shops. This search proved a good one, as there weren’t many. Local historian Richard Pollard suggested that unless there was an event, such as a fire, it was unlikely that small shops such as these would be photographed.³ Families would sometimes commission photographic postcards, but would only have a dozen printed for personal use. The Brassey Institute and Holy Trinity Church are located nearby and, as important local buildings, would often be photographed. Occasionally the



Fig. 3

strip of Trinity Street shops would appear in these photographs inadvertently.⁴

Another main strand of research, conducted by my research assistant Kelly Morgan, was into the suffrage movement, and the Hastings branch of the WSPU (The Women’s Social and Political Union) who, as previously mentioned, opened their headquarters at 8 Trinity Street, in 1911. The WSPU was initiated as a breakaway society from the NUWSS (The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies) and grew increasingly militant, employing violent tactics. The local organiser Dorothy Bowker began as the Hastings branch secretary but in 1912 an infamous suffragette from London, Mary Allen, was sent to take over.⁵ Meetings became so overcrowded that in June 1912 they rented larger premises just around the corner at 8 Claremont.⁶

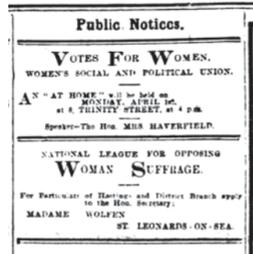


Fig. 6

Shop awnings are being returned to historic neighbourhoods, now in an environmental context. They save energy by assisting climate control within the interiors. With good design, awnings can also increase footfall due to their visibility from the street. For a shop like Wow and Flutter, which displays vinyl record sleeves in the window, an awning would provide much needed shade. Designing an awning for the shop which reflected the selective history described here became the focus of the commission, and so we found ourselves in the realm of Council Planning and Permissions. During the course of many frustrating weeks of waiting, while researching at



Fig. 4

Hastings Library, I uncovered a local newspaper column on the very same issue. In 1886 an intense debate as to whether Mrs Smout should be granted planning permission to install an awning outside her shop was published in the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*.⁷ Our deadline for producing the physical awning this year eventually passed and so our focus and energy moved in earnest to this document and record. Local musician Nick Weekes, a.k.a. Ted Versicolor, came on board with a minimalist, ambient three-part sound work, *Rockpool Outros*, a remix of his Romney Marsh inspired Sewer Songs, returning the project to its marine origins.

My local history research is being integrated into the design of an awning concept for the shop front at Wow and Flutter at 8 Trinity Street, Hastings, by designer Sara De Bondt. Subject to permissions it is hoped that the awning itself will be produced for the 2019 edition of the Coastal Currents Festival.

In the last decade the Trinity Triangle area, also known as the America Ground, has been revived by a new wave of creative, independent projects and businesses such as the annual Hastings Illustration Festival (HiFest) in December, and the America Ground Independents Day in July. And at a time of devastating library closures nationally, the Brassey Library reopened this year after major renovation, contributing further to the contemporary design spirit of the neighbourhood.

2018 is a historic year. It is the centenary of the year that some women – those over 30 who were house owners, wives of house owners, and those who held a university degree – were given the right to vote. And in this year we can find room once again for choice; between analogue and digital, between online and local. In this renewed space, a number of independent and artisanal shops are once again thriving. The British book industry is booming. This commission celebrates the history of design and the worlds of shopkeepers by focusing on some of the women whose innovative work marks the years from 1880 to today.



Fig. 5

FOOTNOTES

- Mrs Smout also had a concession at 3 Old Bond Street Arcade, London. Mary Smout née Woodward was born in August 1834 in Worthen, Shropshire. She married Charles Lickfold Smout. In 1871 Charles’s occupation is given as ‘Commercial Traveller’. By 1881 they had moved to Hastings, living at 3 Trinity Street. Charles’s occupation is recorded as ‘unemployed at present’, but Mary is recorded as a ‘Marine Florist’. Charles died in 1883. In 1891 widowed Mary is living with an unmarried daughter, Cecile. Mary’s occupation is, ‘Manufacturer of Seaweed Decorations’. By 1901 Mary is living with another unmarried daughter, Eleanor Jane, in Kilburn. Eleanor is a ‘Maker of Dew Drop Curtains’. Mary died in Willesden in 1919.
- Dates courtesy of Ann Kramer and Helena Wojtczak; (1911). *The Sex War, Suffragette and Women’s Altered Position*. *The Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, [online]. © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.
- Pollard, R. (2018). *Trinity Street Shops*. [email].
- The recent donation of the Pier Memories archive to Hastings Museum held up research into as yet un-scanned glass plate negatives of 8, Trinity between 1882–90. Do get in touch if you find any photographs of the street from the 1880’s.
- Mary Sophia Allen was a military-minded woman. She became increasingly eccentric, and her apparent support for fascism led to questions about whether she should be interned in 1940. Wojtczak, H. (year unknown). Mary Sophia Allen, 1878–1964. [online] *The Hastings Press*. Available at: www.hastingspress.co.uk/history/allen.html [Accessed 6 August 2018].
- Wojtczak, H. (year unknown). *Suffragettes, The Women’s Social and Political Union, Its Campaign in Hastings and St Leonards*. [online] *The Hastings Press*. Available at: www.hastingspress.co.uk/history/wspu.html [Accessed 6 August 2018].
- The irony of this is here underlined, given that the production of the physical awning for this project was delayed beyond the deadline of the festival by planning permissions; (1886). *The Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, [online]. Available at: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk [Accessed 7 August 2018]. © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.



Fig. 7

The Hastings & St. Leonards Observer.

URBAN SANITARY AUTHORITY BUSINESS PLANS FOR NEW BUILDINGS, &C.

The Roads’ Committee have received an application from Mrs. M. Smout, for permission to fix shutter blinds, to project twelve inches, at her shop-front, No. 8, Trinity-street; an application from Mr. R. L. Davis for permission to place two blind standards in the pavement on the London-road side of his shop, No. 36, London-road, St. Leonards; and application Messrs. Glynde Brothers, for permission to place two outside bracket lamps at the new bar at the Swan Hotel, High-street; and the committee recommended that the several applications be granted on the usual conditions.

The DEPUTY MAYOR – a motion of adoption having been proposed and seconded said he should object to the granting of Mrs. Smout’s application. These sun-blinds were to project twelve inches across the pavement, which was in Trinity-street, he supposed, only about 3 feet 6 inches or 4 foot wide. There would then be only about 3 feet for people to walk along without inconvenience. He should move, as an amendment, that the reports be adopted, with the exception of the recommendation relating to Mrs. Smout, which he proposed should be referred back to the committee.

Mr. WOOD asked how high the blinds would be from the ground.

Mr. BROWN – 2 feet.

Mr. BRYANT considered that this case had gone through committee, and had been passed, and therefore he didn’t see that Mr. Brown was any better than Mr. Bowerman bringing up matters too late.

The MAYOR pointed out that the cases were not at all analogous, but that on the contrary this was the proper time at which to object to matters of this description.

The DEPUTY-MAYOR – I’m not a member of the Roads’ Committee. How could I say anything about it before?

Mr. WESTON observed that the committee had been led to suppose that similar applications had been granted tradespeople in Robertson-street, and that considering how small the traffic was in Trinity-street compared to that in the larger thoroughfare, he did not see how they could object to what Mrs. Smout asked for.

Mr. BRAY thought at least they might refer the matter back to the committee, which had probably been an oversight on their part.

Mr. WESTON – I’ve no objection to that.

Mr. Alderman THORPE contended it had not been an oversight on the part of the committee.

They had gone thoroughly into the matter, and considering the small amount of traffic there was in Trinity-street, he saw no objection to their granting the application.

Mr. BROWN challenged the Town Clerk to produce him the minutes of one single other application of this description which the Council had granted to any tradesmen. He knew there was none. If any of these blinds were used they were put up on trust, and at the risk of the persons concerned.

Mr. Alderman WINTER pointed out that many of the shops in Robertson-street had margins of pavement belonging to the property, and therefore they could project sun-blinds over that part if the occupiers chose. The margin was a pretty wide one, he believed – [Mr. SHEATHER: About 2 feet] – but in Trinity-street this was not the case. The inconvenience of blinds sticking out twelve inches over the pavement would be very great. He would second the Deputy-Mayor’s amendment.

Mr. REVILL thought that besides studying the convenience of the public, they had also to study the interests of their shopkeepers. There was very little traffic in Trinity-street, and he considered the sun-blinds would not inconvenience anyone.

Mr. EATON drew attention to the qualifying circumstances, that as such blinds were generally slanted from the windows, they would probably only project about six inches over the pavement.

Mr. SMITH said the matter was thoroughly thrashed out in the Roads’ Committee. The greatest length that could be gone was twelve inches, and as those kind of blinds seldom, if ever, stayed at a right angle to the window, they would not interfere materially with the traffic or the foot passengers. They were told that similar applications had been previously granted, and so they had not seen that this case could be refused. The Roads’ Committee had at least passed it unanimously.

Mr. SHEATHER saw that some misapprehension prevailed to some of the blinds in Robertson-street. Some of the shops there had pieces of pavement 2 feet, or 2 feet, 6 inches wide, with which they could do as they liked – put boxes on them, or anything of the sort.

Mr. BOWERMAN believed Mr. SHEATHER was wrong on the matter of Robertson-street. Some of the shops there might have margins of pavements of their own, but not all of them.

Mr. SHEATHER – Mine has, and I know some of the others have as well.

Mr. BOWERMAN – Yes, some.

The CHAIRMAN, personally, was opposed to the granting of Mrs. Smout’s application, as he

thought it was setting bad precedent, which they would rue in time to come. As long as he had been connected with the Council, he could not remember any similar demand being complied with. If they granted this one they would have many other tradesmen applying for the same convenience. Such blinds saved the shopkeepers considerable trouble and care, and obviated going to the expense of the overhead shades, with standards. But the inconvenience to travellers on the pavement would be very great, and he thought, for that reason, they should refuse to give permission to put them up. If any shops had them at present they had them entirely at their own risk, and if a man was to knock one down, and even break a window with it, he did not really see how they could make that man pay damages. If this application was granted they would open up a fresh departure altogether.

Mr. BRYANT reiterated the statement that such blinds were seldom at right angles to the windows, and therefore, did not get much in peoples’ way.

Mr. PAINE said it seemed to him the blinds could be twenty four inches as much as twelve inches wide, though they were supposed not to project out beyond the distance of a foot.

Captain HENNAH was sorry he had not been present at the Roads Committee when this case was considered for he certainly should have voted against it. They could scarcely grant this application when only recently they had refused similar blinds to a shop in Wellington-square, and had also objected to the lamps in York-buildings being put up without leave, because they projected an inch and half over the pavement. If this application were granted they would open up a large question.

The amendment was then put and carried by sixteen for to five against and the original motion was, therefore, tacitly agreed to, only so far as it concerned the other cases.

The Hastings and St Leonards Observer,
Saturday May 8th, 1886.

(1886). *The Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, [online]. Available at: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk [Accessed 7 August 2018]. © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.