

Western Morning News

Primary school closure illustrates challenges of a holiday economy

THE photos this week of Prince William playing volleyball on a sun-drenched Cornish beach and strolling in the Scillies could not have provided a better advert for the scenic Westcountry.

With white sands and clear blue skies, the pictures of the Prince of Wales – or Duke of Cornwall as he is referred to while in the Duchy – were featured in newspapers and online across the UK and doubtless around the world.

After months of rain, the sunshine showed off our coastal assets to the best – and just as the summer visitor season begins to get into full swing.

With tourism such a vital revenue generator in this region – from the accommodation, restaurants and attractions to the networks of producers, growers, fishers and suppliers – a royal visit in perfect weather is positive publicity money simply can't buy.

But the challenges of influxes of holidaymakers and daytrippers, and the seasonal fluctuations of a visitor economy, remain the subject of increasing scrutiny, particularly following a surge in staycations prompted by the Covid pandemic.

From higher council tax on second homes to talk of introducing a 'tourist tax', the focus has been on ensuring a balance can be maintained between community life and the income benefits of remaining such a popular part of Britain to visit, whatever the weather.

One story reported on in today's WMN sheds particular light on the impact of holiday lets and second home ownership: the planned closure of a village primary school in south Devon.

Lying on the opposite bank of the River Dart estuary to Dartmouth, Kingswear is a village in the heart of one of the Westcountry's most popu-

lar tourist areas – just the kind of place where visitors look to snap up property and home owners embrace the lucrative lettings market.

The result is that year-round local residency, including families with children, has dwindled, and homes that do come onto the market are less and less affordable.

In 2017, Kingswear Primary School had 66 pupils on roll, and classroom space was at a premium. That figure fell to 13 by 2022/23, and now sadly stands at zero.

Local councillor Jonathan Hawkins believes that closure, now tabled for the premises, "is due to the village being a very beautiful place to live, an expensive place to live, and as such we have a lot of second homes and holiday lets". "We need families to live in our village," he added.

A nearby development at Noss on Dart Marina does not propose affordable housing, a recent council meeting heard, and the availability of other housing sites is constrained.

There is, as another councillor put it, "no point in keeping the school open if there are no children there".

It would take years to build one's way out of such a problem for a place like Kingswear – and many rural settlements are far from suited to growth. In addition, restrictions on second homes and holiday lets have to be weighed against the vital local income they can provide.

How we keep communities alive in desirable areas has become one of the greatest strategic challenges facing the Westcountry. As things stand, many more settlements with dwindling numbers of families will face the same predicament as Kingswear. Nothing illustrates more starkly the changing occupancy of village homes than the closure of a local school.



> 'Migrant Ship' (2024) by Timothy William Lee and (below) 'Slave Ship' JMW Turner (1840)

From slave ship to migrant small boat – Turner re-imagined

A poignant artwork is to go on display at The Gambia's national gallery, writes Andy Lias

WESTCOUNTRY artist Tim Lee's concern for the plight of migrants and his near-lifelong association with The Gambia has resulted in one of his paintings being chosen for display in the African country's national gallery.

Tim's work is titled 'The Migrant Ship', and he has offered it to be housed on loan as part of The National Museum of The Gambia's ongoing story of migration from West Africa – an offer accepted by the museum's curator, Hassoum Ceessay.

The painting, which has been the subject of articles in two of The Gambia's major newspapers, is a re-imagining of an 1840 masterpiece by JMW Turner.

Over his 40 years of annual visits to The Gambia, Tim, from Silverton, near Exeter, has worked with indigenous communities and undertaken charity work, but always felt drawn back to issues concerning African migrants who die in their numbers while trying to reach Europe on what is known as the "Backway" journey.

And during his visit last year Tim saw at first hand the evidence of the



perils they face. "I was on a small beach when one of the drowned boys washed up on the shore before my very eyes," he recalls.

With all this in mind, he began work on his painting – full title 'Migrant Ship - Despair of the Dead and Drowning' – to illustrate the plight of these victims.

Based on Turner's work 'Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying' – subsequently shortened to 'The Slave Ship' – it has echoes of Turner's style, "like a cascade of thousands of ribbons, straps and materials of different colours".

It was a "testing exercise for an artist more used to producing dreamy subaqueous landscapes", Tim says, and asks "Why on earth would anyone want to paint a picture of drowning migrants?"

The answer lies in Turner's own work, which was inspired by an incident in 1781, when the crew of a slave ship named the Zong threw 142 slaves overboard, prompted by navigational errors, dwindling water supplies and chronic overcrowding of the human cargo. The

acting captain claimed insurance for the jettisoned slaves.

It is now accepted as one of the darkest moments of Britain's involvement in the slave trade, but when Turner exhibited his work – now seen as one of his most renowned – at the Royal Academy in 1840, it was poorly received. "It caused a big fuss," Tim says. "The general response at the time was 'Oh dear, we really don't want to know about this, do we?'"

And Tim feels that not much has changed over the past 200 years. "Though a voluntary choice for migrants, rather than the ordered massacre of slaves by drowning, the consequences are not a lot different – the resultant deaths of human cargo with the assistance of people traffickers," he says.

"As an annual visitor to The Gambia for the past 40 years I have met so many young people who have attempted the Backway journey. Some have failed, some succeeded, some are still suffering, some are still missing.

"So it seemed that this painting was an appropriate way of conveying part of the reality facing those who undertake the journey."

In conclusion, Tim says: "Migrant Ship is a meagre reworking of Turner's original with obvious deletions and contemporary additions – an attempt to convey an image that troubles the conscience. That's if any people traffickers have a conscience..."

 We want to hear your views
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On this day

- 330:** Constantinople became the new capital of the Roman Empire.
- 1812:** British Prime Minister Spencer Perceval was shot dead by a bankrupt broker, John Bellingham, as he entered the House of Commons.
- 1888:** Songwriter Irving Berlin was born as Israel Baline in Siberia.
- 1949:** Siam changed its name to Thailand.
- 1981:** Bob Marley died of cancer.
- 1985:** A fire broke out in the main stand of Bradford City football ground and 56 spectators died.
- 1997:** World chess champion Gary Kasparov was defeated by IBM supercomputer Deep Blue.
- 2010:** Conservative Party leader David Cameron became prime minister with

Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg announced as his deputy.

ON THIS DAY LAST YEAR: The famous Kents Cavern in Devon – home to stalagmites, stalactites and a collection of replica ice age animals – went up for sale with an asking price of £2m to £2.5m.

Birthdays

Louis Farrakhan, leader of Nation of Islam, 91; **Eric Burdon**, rock singer (The Animals), 83; **Pam Ferris**, actress, 76; **Jeremy Paxman**, broadcaster, 74 *pictured*; **Frances Fisher**, actress, 72; **John Parrott**, former snooker player commentator, 60; **Holly Valance**, actress and singer, 41.



Thought for the day

Matthew 6:19-20 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.