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DEAL DESPATCH



FIRESIDE READS

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SILLYNESS AHOY!

But all in the name of doing a good deed. Find out what the Deal Pirates are up to

CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE

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HAVING FUN GETTING THINGS DONE!

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A potted history of the Deal Pirates, rum going on in Deal, or a swashbuckling tale of derring do

Not many things warrant a second glance in Deal. We're fully versed in eccentrics and have been for some considerable time. Even when one of the colourful, fully costumed members of the Deal Pirates got the time of our photo shoot wrong and turned up to the mini golf site at 8am, nobody gave him a second glance. "People sometimes laugh at us," says member Gill, aka Pirate Jingle. "But that's about it."

That being said, it's hard not to have noticed some rather tall gentlemen and less lofty women in tricorns, flowing frock coats and bandanas dashing around town. And a parrot with sparkly legs and croc-type claws. All doing their damndest to FUNdraise. These are the super-effective Deal Pirates - a group for whom no challenge is too big (or small).

"We're an independent local community group," Pirate Jingle explains. "We support, and are part of, the Deal community. We provide a mix of projects, events and members' social events. In addition to our other activities, we support local charities and other community groups. We strive for inclusivity, and aim to make membership flexible and affordable. Our motto is: having fun getting things done."

As with many of the best things in Britain, the concept of the Deal Pirates began in a pub. A couple of people from the Rotary Club of Deal, one of whom was David Lister (later to become Pirate Secretary Dandy), wanted to put on an event in Deal to raise funds for local causes and to elevate the profile of the organisation. They invited two newbies to Deal, Julie and Garry Kemp, to the Farrier pub for a chat and a pint, and this is where the shenanigans began. Several ideas were bandied about, including a Santa fun run in the middle of August, but finally the concept of a treasure hunt was agreed upon. Volunteers were gathered from inside and outside of the Rotary organisation and, in August 2019, the first treasure hunt took place. It was a resounding success, not only raising funds for two local organisations (the Rowing Club and the Sea Scouts) ▶





but actually injecting a sense of genuine fun into fundraising.

Buoyed with this success, many of those involved with the treasure hunt went on to help with running of the Boxing Day Dip. In particular, a number of them became “Bucketeers” for the day - relieving obliging members of the crowd of any treasure/loose change they were carrying.

And then came Covid. Luckily, the strong bond the Pirates had formed meant that they came out of the other side of restrictions with the same enthusiasm for helping the community as before. The lockdown made many people fully realise what a wonderful place we’re fortunate enough to live in and made them want to give something back. So in July 2021, the Pirates arranged to decorate the Cleary Room at the Landmark Community Centre. A call for volunteers was sent out. The project was another great success and as well as improving the space itself, the Pirates were able to recruit enough volunteers to form a Rotary satellite club. More hands-on projects followed, allowing the initial nine satellite members to springboard to 21. “I will always remember the 2021 Treasure Hunt,” says Captain Garry. “The number of people who said it was

the first event they’d attended since lockdown and how good it was to get the family out enjoying themselves again.”

It became clear to all that were part of the satellite club that the Pirates were very different to its parent club, the Rotary Club of Deal. The Pirates’ main focus was projects, getting involved in the wider community and having fun. And so in May 2022 the first new Rotary Club in the district for over a decade was formed. Much to the disappointment of the Pirates, Rotary International rejected their choice of name as they didn’t feel it was “suitable”. So the Pirates were officially registered as The Three Castles of Deal Rotary Club instead.

Undeterred, the Pirates made attempts to show Rotary how to break out of the traditional mould. For instance, at the annual district conference they began a presentation to 400 Rotarians by running down the aisle to rousing pirate music, then putting the assistant district governor in a pillory (a set of stocks to the uninitiated) and finally showing everyone present their secret weapon for recruiting new members: a pot of paint. But this novel approach to community service wasn’t widely appreciated by most Rotarians, and the Pirates felt constrained by an apparently rigid structure and the Rotary membership

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fee. In September 2023 the members of the Pirates took a vote to leave Rotary. On 1 May this “revolting” group set sail under the banner of The Deal Pirates.

“As before, the group has strong community values, balancing projects, events and group social events using our energy and drive to get things done,” says Shirley, aka Pirate Seren. “We give mutual support to all members and support other organisations who wouldn’t be able to achieve the desired result without some advice. We continue to be a democratic band with all members having an equal voice. In addition to providing people with a volunteering outlet, we also gave them

a great network, particularly valuable to newcomers to Deal.”

“We all have busy lives and other commitments,” says Garry the Captain. “Members aren’t required to attend every meeting, event or activity. They just give as much time as they have available. Our meetings don’t involve a costly dining experience - you don’t even have to buy a drink. Having said that, after our meetings we usually head off to the pub! Nobody’s expected to come along, although most do and this is when real business gets done.” And the social aspect to the group is important in many ways. “Being a widow and a DFL, early retirement was daunting until I became a Pirate,” Pirate Seren reveals. “Now I have new friends, have fun doing things I would never have done and feel I am giving something back to my beloved adopted home.” Emily (aka Pirate Azure) concurs. “I love being part of a group where everyone’s input is valued and we are all in the same position of wanting to make a difference and get stuck in.” Sheila (aka Pirate Sheila O) also enthuses. “I love the variety of things we’ve tried. Bell-ringing at Mongeham church was a real experience - except I was clearly not a natural as I instinctively closed my eyes each time the rope/sally returned!” ▶

“What great fun the Pirates had with our entry into the 2024 Carnival,” Pirate Dandy remembers. “Most of our crew (including Polly) were there on the day, dressed in our resplendent pirate (or parrot) outfits. We skirmished ahead, beside and behind our hand-propelled pirate ship, fashioned in just two hours on a wagon the size of (but with less control than) a supermarket trolley. We engaged with many spectators throughout, bringing colour and mirth to the procession. Swashbuckling along the route involved choreographed cutlass duelling by four of our more belligerent members. A wonderful feature this year was inclusion in our ranks of a young man with challenges, who enjoyed life as a Pirate for a couple of hours.”

Julie (aka Polly) explains that the diversity of the group is accidental but welcome. “We’ve got people from all walks of life. It’s not that everyone’s a professional person or ex-professional person – we’ve got different ages, backgrounds and skills.”

All this larking about takes serious dedication. “As far as ridiculous things go, where do I begin?” laughs Polly. “Dressing as a giant parrot and being



pulled along on a float in the Carnival is up there with them, and so is being a human fruit machine when helping out another group’s event. Did I mention dusting a giant carved bear? Or being Santa’s rather large elf helper? We’re good at enjoying our downtime, too. A group of us went to see *Little Women* at Walmer Castle – you’ve never seen so many crying Pirates in one place!”

Pirate couple Gill and Simon (Pirate Lofty) are also amused by the group’s antics. “Our first event was helping at Santa’s Grotto, which mostly involved holding onto the grotto to stop it from blowing away in the wind. The faces of the kids were just amazing, and they spoke so intently to Santa about whether or not they had been good or bad that year and what they would like him to bring them (with parental ears flapping nearby). One child asked for a pony – the mum’s face was an absolute picture. We all tried not to laugh.”

When it comes to undertaking projects and organising events, subgroups are their secret weapon. In short, when they decide on a particular project or event, a subgroup of between three and five members is formed. This subgroup is empowered and encouraged to make decisions, reporting back on progress to the wider group at the bi-weekly meetings. If they need help from the membership they just ask. The projects are many and varied. Just recently a group asked for advice on running a fundraising picnic at St Saviour’s church, which the Pirates were more than happy to help with. Even Dover District Council sometimes asks for help. “I got a call from DDC asking if the Pirates would help with an event that was so secret I wasn’t allowed to let the others know what it was – I could only tell them once it was announced publicly,” says the Captain. “On my recommendation, the Pirates agreed to help with the event

– there was a great deal of speculation over the next few weeks but none of the Pirates guessed correctly before the announcement. The job was to escort the Queen’s Baton for the Relay in the 2022 Commonwealth Games down the length of the pier. Pirate Dandy was interviewed live on Radio Kent, and told them we were there to steal the baton and our ship was washed up on the Goodwin Sands – it was a good light-hearted interview.”

Knowing the town and its needs so well, there’s one project the Pirates would really like to throw themselves into – funding permitted. “I would fully restore the Landmark,” says Pirate Sheila O. “It’s an amazing building but it desperately needs major renovation. It would be great to see an interior up to 21st-century specifications and the historical exterior made good.” Polly agrees. “The Landmark Centre is the home of the Pirates and is such a wonderful resource and a true community asset. I would like to be able to do all that is needed to ensure that it continues.”

This merry band often don’t contain themselves to swashbuckling. Some of the Pirates are also members of other Deal community groups – like Deal Repair Café, Deal Collective, Deal Area Foodbank, Deal and Walmer Chamber of Trade and some are still members of Rotary as well as being Pirates. You can’t go to many places in Deal without bumping into a Pirate (often well disguised).

If you need help from the Deal Pirates or would like to join their ever-growing ranks, email info@dealpirates.org or go to dealpirates.org. facebook.com/thedealpirates

With thanks to Roman Landings Adventure Golf, Walmer Green, The Strand, Walmer CT14 7DP

PIRATES GIVING BACK

It’s not just treasure hunts and carnival capers the team have been up to. So far they’ve also organised:

- The annual Sandown Castle Gardens picnic
- The Boxing Day Dip (in association with the Rotary Club of Deal)
- Building bug hotels for local schools
- Santa’s grotto in Deal Market
- Making planters for the Deal station gardening group
- Marshalling at various events including Deal Pride and the Deal Christmas Lights Switch On
- Helping out at the Deal Music and Arts Festival
- Cleaning and tidying at Deal Museum

Coming soon:

- Foodbank collection at Sainsbury’s
- Decorating at the Landmark Centre
- British Legion quiz

