

11 REASONS to love STURMINSTER NEWTON

Rachael Rowe, organiser of the Sturminster Newton Literary Festival, shares some of her favourite things to do in this delightful Dorset town



PHOTO: JOHN GLAMISTOCK EDITORIAL GETTY IMAGES PLUS

STURMINSTER NEWTON

A MAGNIFICENT MILL ON THE STOUR

Sturminster Newton (Stur to locals) is a delightful town in the heart of Blackmore Vale. Sitting either side of a six-arch 16th century stone bridge (Sturminster one side, Newton on the other), upstream is the town's showstopper, 1000-year-old working water mill. Sturminster Newton Mill is of a series of ancient flour mills built on the River Stour, there is evidence that a mill existed here in 1016, and it still stone-grinds flour when its open. And on September 21, as part of the History Festival, join a tour (11am-5pm) about the story of swanskin cloth production, a tough waterproof cloth which was made here for Newfoundland's cod fishermen. Opening times at sturminsternewton-museum.co.uk/mill



PHOTO SUPPLIED BY RACHAEL ROWE

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

While a visit to Sturminster Newton Mill is fascinating, it's also well worth exploring Sturminster Newton Museum, located in the 16th century thatched Old Market Cross House in the centre of town. Within its eclectic collections is a bath chair belonging to Dorset dialect poet, William Barnes, and insights into how the town developed including the history of the creamery, where prize-winning cheeses were once made. Discover how the Hinton St Mary Mosaic, now in the British Museum, was excavated, and in the 'Railway Room', there's a scale model of the former Sturminster Newton station (closed in 1966) and the adjacent livestock market. Free admission. Find opening times at sturminsternewton-museum.co.uk/museum

A LEGENDARY FAMILY BUSINESS

Harts of Stur on Station Road is an award-winning independent family business going back four generations. Walter Hart, a farrier in the Royal Field Artillery, established a blacksmith business in 1919. This evolved from forge and workshop to hardware shop to country department store. When you need a 'thingummy' to fix something visit its legendary DIY department which is staffed by people who know their stuff. Harts of Stur are one of the UK's largest in-store (pictured) and online retailers of cookware, kitchenware and kitchen electric equipment. It sells everything from tools to camping gear, clothing to gardening items. Enjoy homemade cakes and light lunches in the Harts Coffee Loft. hartsofstur.com



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FROM BANKS TO EMPORIUMS

Once upon a time, our town high streets would have not one but several banks. The rise of online banking meant that most branches closed. The buildings they are in can be tricky to regenerate, but not in Sturminster Newton. 1855 (the date the building was constructed), formerly home to NatWest, is now full of eclectic items by local artisans. From handmade chocolates and bespoke hats to ironwork, jewellery, glassware, and toys. There's even a wine cellar in the old bank vault! Two other former banks have been converted into a second-hand emporium and a used furniture store with profits going towards funding the town's floral displays and Christmas decorations. 1855sturminsternewton.co.uk

A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

It's the people that make Stur a special town, and the Vale Family Hub is something extraordinary. Originally formed as a social supermarket that helps families or individuals who struggle financially (valepantry.co.uk, membership required), its hub at Butts Pond is now so much more and anyone is welcome. There's a friendly cafe (they do a superb breakfast bap) and kid's play area, and quiet spaces for discussions, connecting people in a rural setting. You'll find social prescribers, Citizen's Advice, and more in this integrated space where the team work to reduce social isolation and help with financial issues. When I visited, volunteers were planning fishing trips for local children. valefamilyhub.co.uk



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CRAFTY STUFF

Stur is full of indie shops including several specialist crafting businesses. Hansons Fabrics & Crafts on Station Road has a vast stock of fabrics and crafting materials to make anything from dresses and quilts to curtains. They also sell sewing machines, offering both workshops and one-to-one classes. The Green Lake Craft Studio (above) on The Parade offers inspiration and supplies to for crochet creations and there’s a glittering array of bead and jewellery kits at Beads with a Twist on Market Place, both offer workshops. The Workhouse Chapel on Bath Road is where Handmade for Christmas, a local art and craft Maker’s Market, runs from November 1 onwards. hansonsfabrics.com; thegreenlakecraftstudio.com; beadswithatwist.com; workhousechapel.co.uks

LOCAL CIDER MAKER

Orchard 101 is an award-winning family-run craft cider maker in Sturminster Newton. The orchards, planted 25 years ago, annually produce 10-20 tonnes of cider apples. Within the orchard are 27 varieties of apple tree including Harry Masters, Warrior, Somerset Redstreak, and Tremlett Bitter. Each year, 6000 litres of cider is produced by Orchard 101, and the small batch volume also helps retain traditional artisan methods for making their medium dry farmhouse cider, apple cider vinegar and apple juices which can be bought in 1855 on Market Cross. Finally, to determine provenance, each bottle is numbered so it can be traced back to the original apple tree in the orchard. orchard101.co.uk



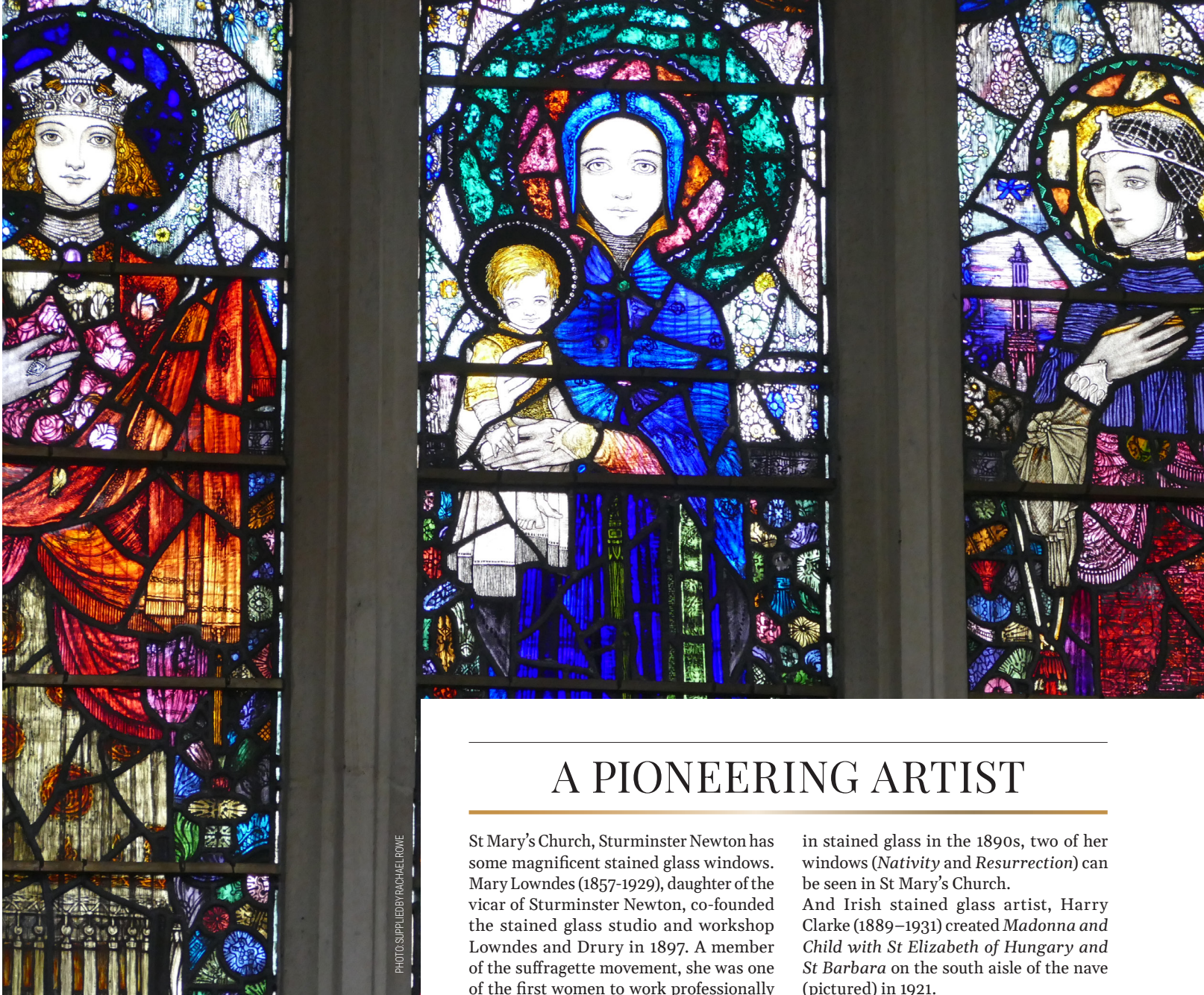
FABULOUS FESTIVALS

There’s something happening every month to attract people to Stur and provide interesting events for locals. Happening in September are the award-winning Sturminster Newton Cheese Festival (September 13 & 14) which celebrates Blackmore Vale’s dairy roots (pictured), and new this year is a History Festival (September 20-28) shining the light on Stur’s rich heritage with exhibitions, films, walks, and talks. Sturminster Newton Literary Festival, held in June, not only celebrates writers with a Dorset and Wessex connection, but also the three writers associated with the town – William Barnes, Robert Young and Thomas Hardy – the latter wrote *The Return of the Native* whilst renting Riverside Villa from Young. cheesefestival.co.uk; sturminster-newton.org.uk/event; sturlitfest.com



DREAM MACHINES

On the first Saturday of the month the Sturminster Newton Car and Bike Enthusiasts event is held at the bottom of Railway Gardens (9am to midday). What started as five vehicles in 2018 has grown to up to 350 vehicles. The town car parks are free for the day, as is entry to this, and visitors come from all over the south to either admire the range of vehicles or bring their own classic car or bike to display. There are even sections for brands where attendance is significant, these include Porsches, Minis, Vintage, and Fiat Arbarths. Poets Corner Café is where enthusiasts gather for a bacon roll and coffee. sturminster-newton.org.uk/event



A PIONEERING ARTIST

St Mary’s Church, Sturminster Newton has some magnificent stained glass windows. Mary Lowndes (1857-1929), daughter of the vicar of Sturminster Newton, co-founded the stained glass studio and workshop Lowndes and Drury in 1897. A member of the suffragette movement, she was one of the first women to work professionally

in stained glass in the 1890s, two of her windows (*Nativity* and *Resurrection*) can be seen in St Mary’s Church. And Irish stained glass artist, Harry Clarke (1889–1931) created *Madonna and Child with St Elizabeth of Hungary* and *St Barbara* on the south aisle of the nave (pictured) in 1921.



DIP INTO THE DELI

Olives et Al’s amazing deli HQ is at North Dorset Business Park in Sturminster Newton. Each time I go here I’m tempted to sample their dazzling array of olives, even though I’m fully aware of their deliciousness. For over three decades, owner Giles Henschel has travelled Europe and the Middle East sourcing the best olives and authentic foods to bring back to Dorset. Browse regional cheeses, deli sandwiches, and their award-winning products from kiln-roasted nuts to dressings, sauces and condiments. There’s a good wine selection and locally made specialities like Dorset Chocolate’s Stars Over Cranborne, Portland White and Minterne Mint bars all made down the road in Bagber. olivesetal.co.uk dorsetchocolate.com