



**THE BEGINNING**

The roots of the America Ground lay in the weather. Back in 1287, a series of terrible storms, wreaked havoc on Kent and Sussex, submerging forests, shifting the course of rivers and dramatically reshaping their coastlines.

Hastings was badly affected. Once the south's best natural port, the storms blocked the town's harbour with silt and pebbles, forming a huge shingle bank. This new piece of land, which comprises the area now bounded by Robertson Street, Trinity Triangle, Carlisle Parade and Harold Place, fell just outside the boundaries of Hastings Borough - effectively making it a no-man's land. The locals soon realised that they could live on this land free from taxes and rents. Consequently, many moved in, building a thriving but ramshackle community of shops, houses and workplaces.

By 1822, an estimated 1,000 people lived on the bank, forcing Hastings Borough into action. Taking inspiration from the recent American Revolution, the residents reacted defiantly, declaring themselves independent from Hastings as the 'twenty-fourth' US state and hoisting the Stars and Stripes flag. The famous America Ground was born.

**THE GROUND & ROPE WALK**

The main thoroughfare was a level stretch called 'Rope Walk', which largely corresponded with Robertson Street. Due to its flatness, it attracted rope-makers who erected upturned boat hulls along it as makeshift shelters.

While Hastings Borough decried it as a lawless den of iniquity, the facts suggest a fairly well organised community. Research reveals that much land was occupied by lodging houses,

carpenters, limekilns, warehouses, tallow factories and small farm holdings. There was also a school and gin palace, but no church.

By the 1820s, the dark clouds that triggered the declaration of the America Ground were gathering. Squabbles arose between the Hastings Corporation and the Earl of Chichester over who officially owned the land. In addition, Hastings was turning into a fashionable resort, attracting new construction and affluent middle classes fascinated by the town's 'quaint' poor communities. The spirit that fuelled the America Ground was about to be lit, but also quickly extinguished.

**THE CROWN TAKES THE GROUND**

The storm clouds that forced the establishment of the America Ground also destroyed it. In the early 1820s, Hastings Borough made several attempts to impose control on the area, prompting the declaration of independence. However, the problems for the residents grew when it was found that no title deeds existed for property on the land.

The death knell came on 6th December 1827, when five Commissioners and 12 Jurymen met at the George Hotel in Battle. Without consulting with or referring to the land's residents, they ruled that the Ground should be seized on behalf of King George IV.

By 1834, the Ground was cleared, with many residents having already moved to St. Leonards. In 1849, a new chapter opened when the developer Patrick Robertson leased the Ground area from the Crown.

The America Ground may have gone but the spirit behind it is still celebrated in Hastings today, nearly 200 years on.

**COMMEMORATE THE FESTIVAL WITH A LIMITED EDITION CD**

The limited edition CD has been produced as a tribute to the 1000 or so people who created a unique piece of history some 200 years ago. The CD was recorded at Studio 24, located in the America Ground, and a number of songs on the CD were specially written in response to the story.

A limited edition of 2000 copies of the CD will be available for purchase on the festival day, online at [www.americaground.co.uk](http://www.americaground.co.uk) and throughout the year at businesses located in the area for only £7.99.



For more information about the story, the annual Independent Day event and year round activities please visit [www.americaground.co.uk](http://www.americaground.co.uk)



- 1** Stage and central event area
- 2** Festival HQ and lost children point @ Hastings Trust
- 3** First Aid/St John Ambulance
- 4** Dog parade registration point
- 5** Trinity Triangle
- 6** Art sale @ White Rock Hotel
- 7** Hastings Ukelele Group @ Arthur Green
- 8** Priory Square
- 9** Thomas Brassey Steps
- Parade route

Designed by: www.designcrew.co.uk

## HASTINGS CELEBRATES INDEPENDENT DAY ON JULY 4TH 2010

- 14.00** **1** **EVENT RUNNING ORDER**  
The afternoon will commence with an official opening by the Mayor and Town Crier.
- 14.10** Ceremonial raising of the America Ground flag.
- 14.15** South East All Stars arrive at the stage after parading along the seafront. Perform routine by the stage. Then parade off around Trinity Triangle.
- 14.30** Stage goes live.
- 14.30-15.00** Beachy Headbangers.  
Spoken Word - on stage.
- 15.10-15.30** Section 5 Drumming Parade starts at Debenhams, along seafront, round Trinity Triangle to stage.  
JoLee.  
Section 5 Drummers arrive at stage.  
Sambalanco starts at stage then sets off around Trinity Triangle.

- 15.45-16.15** Snakestone.  
Spoken Word - on stage ... followed by Vocal Explosion - Song for America Ground.
- 16.30-17.15** The Two Bob Band.
- 17.15-18.00** Dave Sharp (The Alarm) Solo acoustic.
- 18.15-19.00** Eric Faulkner (Bay City Rollers) Solo acoustic.  
**19.00** Live stage and main event closes.
- 5** **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES DURING THE AFTERNOON**  
**14.00-19.00** The history of the America Ground display in Holy Trinity Church.  
A range of stalls will be open all afternoon run by local traders - check out the bargains.
- 6** Exhibition and sale of works by local artists will take place at the White Rock Hotel.  
'Uncle Sam' on stilts.  
South Pole AKademy will be giving displays at various times through the afternoon and demonstrating how to get fit through Pole Dancing.

- 7** Mad Jack Morris Dancers (seafront end of Robertson Street).  
The See at F-ISH Gallery.  
The Hastings Ukelele Sunday School at Arthur Green.  
American style diner and art sale at eat@cafe.
- 15.30** **4** Fancy Dress Dog Parade on promenade (registration at 15.00 on seafront end of Robertson Street).
- 8** **ACTIVITIES IN PRIORY SQUARE SHOWCASING LOCAL ARTISTS**  
**12.00-18.00** 'A Local Slice of F-ISH' Show at Priory Square ground floor.  
**16.00-20.00** Claudia Molitor and Sarah Nicolls. Recently staged at the De La Warr Pavillion this piece explores sound, movement, the body and visual imagery. Working with Sarah Nicoll's unique upturned piano.  
**19.30-20.00** The Class. Female choir group (with John Cornford as conductor).

**IN THE EVENING ... 19.00-ONWARDS**  
Live entertainment will continue at venues around the America Ground and the seafront. Hosts include:  
Tin Tins, French's, Walkers, Trinity, JD's, Thai Xperience, Frenz and Pig in Paradise. There's something for everyone - rock, blues, jazz, acoustic and more.

For more of the history of the America Ground please visit [www.americaground.co.uk](http://www.americaground.co.uk)



Details correct at time of going to print but subject to change.

