

Dating dilemmas, a pirate puzzle, a cuddly koala, and a murder mystery

Reading writers have been busy putting pen to paper. **Caroline Cook** takes a look at four books hitting the online shelves

A READING man has published a humorous book about his experience of returning to the dating scene at the age of 40. After coming home one day to discover his wife was seeing another man, business coach Dave Gammon found himself back on the market, and decided to write a book about it. Tidy Up On Your Way Out is an



Dave Gammon, author of Tidy Up On Your Way Out

account of his experiences over the next six years which include flying to Moscow for a date with a woman he met online, and getting a bit too friendly with his cleaner.

After spending thousands of pounds and travelling thousands of miles, Dave soon begins to realise what he really needs to be happy. ■ Tidy Up On Your Way Out is available to download via Amazon and the App Store.

■ A former lecturer at the University

of Reading has co-authored a book exploring the mysteries of children's literature.

Dennis Butts, who taught children's literature studies at the university, has teamed up with Peter Hunt, a former recipient of the Brothers Grimm Award for services to children's literature, to write *How Did Long John Silver Lose his Leg?* and *Twenty-Six Other Mysteries of Children's Literature*.

The book takes a look at unanswered mysteries in the nation's favourite children's books, posing questions like whether Bobbie's train in *The Railway Children* could really have stopped in time?

■ *How Did Long John Silver Lose his Leg?*, published by Lutterworth Press, is out now. Visit www.lutterworth.com.

■ A VISIT to a koala sanctuary has inspired a new children's book written and illustrated by a Tilehurst artist.

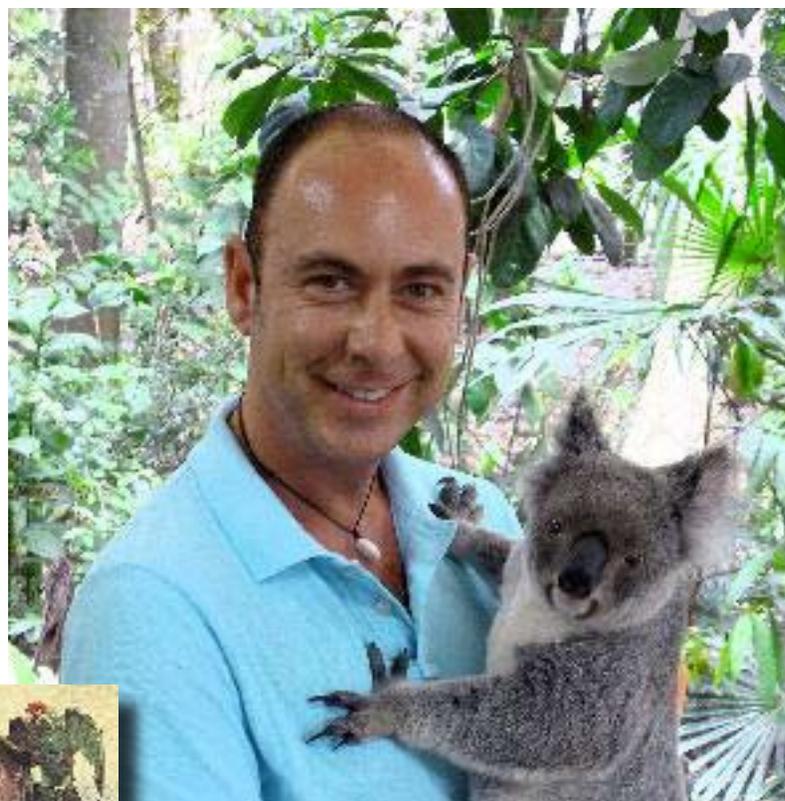
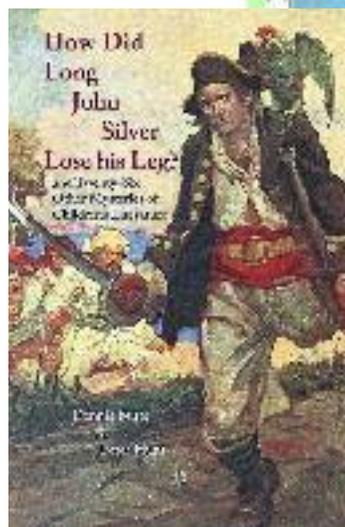
Simon Pink created colourful children's book *Kassandra Koala Visits the Farm* after being enthralled by the charming creatures during a visit to Australia.

"These furry and very heavy creatures always seem to be nosey, wanting to know what's going on from high in their eucalyptus trees," says the 45-year-old.

"In the book, Kassandra always has a camera with her to snap any exciting opportunities that may come her way. I wanted to bring a modern feel to a children's book by her using a camera, but also make children interested in documenting days out."

The book follows Kassandra and her best friend Linda the ladybird on an adventure to the farm where they try to snap pictures of their new friends.

■ *Kassandra Koala visits the Farm*,



Simon Pink, author of Kassandra Koala Visits the Farm, with a koala at an Australian sanctuary. Left, the cover of How Did Long John Silver Lose his Leg? and Twenty-Six Other Mysteries of Children's Literature by Dennis Butts and Peter Hunt

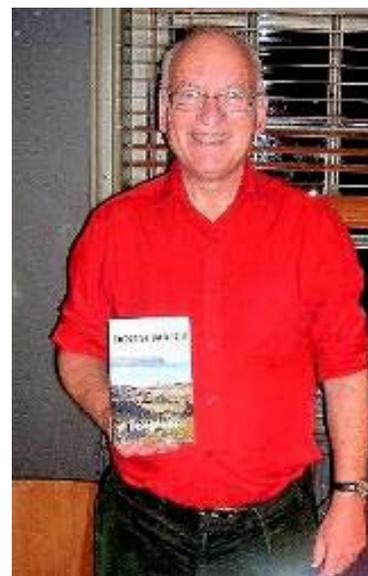
published by Nightingale Books, is out now. Visit www.simonpink.com.

■ FANS of crime thrillers can get stuck into a new mystery novel by a Caversham writer.

David Burnell has self-published his debut novel *Doom Watch*, which is based around The Doom Bar, a treacherous sandbank in North Cornwall.

A policeman is struggling to solve a murder with no clue to the victim's identity, a stag party is faced with an unexpected event, and a woman is trying to find solace after the death of

her husband. David, who is retired, was inspired to write the book after talking to volunteers at The Doom Bar who told him about all the boats that have got into trouble at the banks over the years. ■ *Doom Watch* is available to download via Amazon.



Caversham writer David Burnell, author of Doom Watch

Sewer shot lands top prize for Mike

AN EARLEY photographer has been named Professional Photographer of the Year 2013 at a magazine awards ceremony.

Mike Deere, who is a wedding and commercial photographer, took the top prize in the Professional Photographer awards, which recognises the big players in the photography industry.

There were 13 individual categories, with an overall winner being selected from the winners of each group. Mike came top in the

Location Flash category before also winning the top prize.

"My winning photo was taken in the London sewer system, depicting both the nature of the system itself and the adventurous individuals who seek out these unseen places within urban environments," says the 28-year-old.

"This particular photo was taken in the River Westbourne underneath Hyde Park. The overflow coming in from the left of the photo allows water to drain from The Serpentine during

rainfall to prevent the park from flooding."

Mike was presented with his winner's trophy at a glittering awards ceremony at Manor By the Lake in Cheltenham. He was also given a professionally-produced print of his photograph and was featured in a special supplement in the Professional Photographer magazine.

■ To see more of Mike's stunning photographs visit www.mikedeere.com.



Mike Deere with his winning image

theatre review

Brilliantly silly festive show

The Nativity Play Goes Wrong

Until Saturday, January 4
Reading Rep at Reading
College Theatre
www.readingrep.com

IF EVERY Nativity was like Reading Rep's festive offering churches would be packed to the rafters and schools would be selling out weeks in advance.

All the pieces of the traditional Nativity puzzle are there but it's like someone has picked up the box and given it a good shake to turn everything on its head.

The Angel Gabriel is flying rather precariously, the lights are dodgy, there's a cow dressed as a donkey and a snake is on the loose (yes, of course there was a snake at the birth of baby Jesus).

Instead of walking into a Reading Rep production, the audience are invited to take their seats to watch the CHRIST theatrical group (don't ask me what the acronym was, but there was Reading in there somewhere).

A bunch of misfit amateurs, the group amble their way through the Nativity story, making us laugh harder each time something goes awry.

Bryony Corrigan as foreign speaking Ilonka Borbala is hilarious, her turns as a donkey and a sheep both brilliant, and her 'I-have-no-idea-what's-going-on-but-I'm-just-going-to-smile-manically' expression a constant source of giggles.

Stage hand Sean (Niall Ransome) is also very funny, his increasingly panic-stricken eyes making the audience splutter with laughter as the set falls to pieces around him.

Sean's double-act with show director Chris (Christopher Currie) is also wonderful, their fight played out through bits of scenery in a genius manner, which I won't go in to for fear of ruining the jokes.

And jokes there were aplenty. The humour is witty and quick, so much so I'd quite happily see the show again to catch the laughs I may have missed while chuckling at something else.

I suspect things may get more raucous as the run continues and the cast get to know their characters a bit more, and that will certainly be no bad thing.

The Nativity Play Goes Wrong is the kind of Nativity we secretly wish for, the home video where little Tommy drops the baby Jesus half way during *Away in a Manger* and becomes the star of the show.

Brilliantly funny, silly, and certain to put a smile on your face, The Nativity Play Goes Wrong is without doubt the best Nativity you'll see this year.

CAROLINE COOK