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TRIBUTE

# Fond memories of BBC reporter who broke the story of Apollo 13

By Chris Britcher

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TRIBUTES have been paid to Reg Turnill, the legendary BBC aerospace correspondent who reported on the most thrilling years of the space race, and who died this week.

Mr Turnill passed away after several months of ill health at the Pilgrims' Hospice in Ashford. He was 97.

Born in Dover, he spent recent years living in Sandgate, where he became an active member of the community.

He enjoyed a remarkable career which continued long after his retirement, supporting and founding the popular HG Wells short story competition in Folkestone each year and personally putting up the £1,000 top prize in order to inspire authors to write in the style of the famous storyteller. It forms a key part of the HG Wells Festival in the town which Mr Turnill helped create in 2009.

But it was his time with the BBC for which he will be most remembered.

Having started his Fleet Street career with the Press Association when he was 15, he joined the BBC in 1956 as assistant industrial correspondent. Two years later, he was promoted to air and space correspondent and found himself at the centre of the fast-emerging space race between the US and USSR.

Among his assignments was a trip to Moscow to cover the first manned space launch, and reporting from the US on the Apollo Moon missions. It was in 1970 he secured his biggest scoop when he was the first journalist in the world to break the news that Apollo 13 was in trouble when he heard the immortal words 'Houston we have a problem' as he made a late night visit to mission control.

Speaking of the moment years later, he said: "I was just leaving the deserted press centre when I heard the famous words. By 5am I'd broken the story. The astronauts were in deadly danger."

In 1969, he was on board the maiden flight of



**JOURNALIST:** Reg Turnill went on assignment to Nasa during the Apollo Moon missions

Concorde and continued his association with the BBC – most recently contributing to the corporation's coverage of the death of Neil Armstrong, the first man on the Moon.

In later years, he became an active member of the Sandgate Society, and a key player in the HG Wells Festival.

However, he found his strict rules had to be relaxed in order to appease a modern audience.

Speaking to KoS two years ago, he said: "I wanted people to write the stories by hand as a condition of entry to address the low standard of literacy and handwriting these days.

"It's an important art in itself and many of our most famous authors find that's the best way to do creative writing. My aim in offering the £1,000 prize was to get people to mimic what HG Wells did in the 1900s."

Organisers of this year's awards said: "His death is a great loss to many as he was a great man. Our thoughts are with his family."

Nick Spall, fellow of the British Interplanetary Society, added: "He was the astronaut who never made it to the Moon."

He leaves behind his wife Margaret and their two sons.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ➔ Probe into gun death

A MAJOR police investigation was launched on Tuesday night when a 32-year-old man died after being shot in Dartford.

Kevin McKinley was found with gun shot wounds at around 8pm on Overy Street after reports of a shooting. He was rushed to hospital but died of his injuries.

At the time of going to press, four people had been arrested by officers. Anyone who may have any information should contact police on 101.

### ➔ Meet the commissioner

POLICE and Crime Commissioner Ann Barnes is staging the first of a series of 'meet the commissioner' events in Maidstone this week - with anyone interested in policing invited to attend.

The aim is to give the public the opportunity to raise issues directly with the elected PCC.

This week's event takes place on Wednesday at Oakwood House at 6.30pm. To book a place visit [www.kent-pcc.gov.uk](http://www.kent-pcc.gov.uk).

### ➔ Hit guitarist dies at 72

ROCK musician Rick Huxley, one of the founding members of 1960s chart sensation The Dave Clark Five, has died. He was 72.

The bass guitarist, who was born in Dartford, had been battling emphysema after years of heavy smoking.

He joined the band in 1958 after responding to a small ad placed by Dave Clark. He would be a key member of the band during its hey-day with hits such as Glad All Over and Bits and Pieces, until it split in 1970. He would go on to work for Dartford-based amplifier manufacturers Vox.

ART

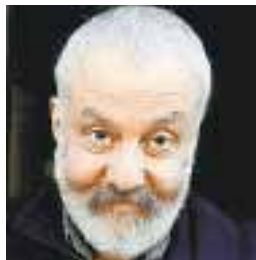
## Mike Leigh directs JMW Turner film

RENOWNED artist JMW Turner is to be the focus of a new movie by acclaimed director Mike Leigh.

And in order to develop inspiration for the big screen production, Mr Leigh has paid a visit to the Turner Contemporary gallery in Margate – which is named after, and displays a number of works by, the artist.

The film is to star Timothy Spall – best known for his roles in Secrets & Lies and the Harry Potter films as Peter Pettigrew – who will portray the artist whose landscapes and seascapes of Kent elevated him into art's elite.

Mr Leigh said: "Turner as a character is compelling. I want to explore the man, his working life, his relationships and how he lived. But what fascinates me most is the drama that lies



**DIRECTOR:** Mike Leigh

in the tension between this driven eccentric and the epic, timeless world he evoked in his masterpieces."

The production, which remains untitled, will be co-financed by Focus Features International, the British Film Institute and Film4.

News of the film has been

met with excitement at the Turner Contemporary.

Director Victoria Pomery said: "We've known for a while about the production of this film and are thrilled it is being made. Turner is one of the nation's most popular painters."

Ms Pomery also revealed that the director had been in contact with the gallery.

"Mike Leigh attended the opening of our Turner and The Elements exhibition last year. There is a huge public appetite for art and JMW Turner had an amazing and eventful life."

Alison Thompson, co-president of Focus Features International, added: "We're looking forward to this new venture with Mike, whose unique style and storytelling is bound to deliver a compelling and beautiful film."

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