

International collection of jigsaws goes on display in Suffolk

The Wyverstone Jigsaw Festival is taking place this weekend, showcasing hundreds of puzzles from around the world.

By **Danielle Lett**



In 2020, interest in puzzles skyrocketed.

As Britons were stuck indoors during the height of lockdown, many of them turned to the pastime. And in turn, this caused a boom in the puzzle industry which saw 15 million sold over the course of a year, with sales totalling £100m.

And one group of Suffolk puzzle fanatics loves them so much they're hosting a highly-anticipated puzzle festival this weekend.

Penny Black is one of the masterminds behind the Wyverstone Jigsaw Festival – an annual sale and celebration of all things puzzly.

Penny, who set up the festival alongside friend Jill Davis, cannot wait for their second event – and has over 1,000 puzzles waiting for eager enthusiasts to enjoy.

But how did the event come about?

Looking for ways to raise funds for her local church, Penny got in touch with her friend and fellow puzzle enthusiast Jill, and went from there.

“Jill runs one at Kedington in aid of her church, and she very kindly gave me the idea and showed me how to set one up here in Wyverstone,” she explains.

“We had a few people here in the village keen on doing something with puzzles, and that's how it started really. We have monthly puzzle meetings where we have coffee and cake – it's open to everybody and it's very much a whole community project.”

And soon, the pieces fell into place.

“We had no idea how it would pan out, but it was quite successful so we thought we'd do it again.”

With Covid hampering their plans two years in a row, 2022's puzzle festival has been three

years in the making, and Penny and her team of volunteers now have 1,000 puzzles made up and ready to be sold.

“As a child I did puzzles and as a family we usually have one going at Christmas,” says Penny. “They're a great way to switch off – you can choose your picture and just enjoy the process of completing it. You can do it as a solitary activity, or a group. For us as a family, we'll do one and chat – it's a nice and social.

“It's also not a very expensive hobby either, as you can get puzzles from secondhand shops for around £2-£3. And it's good for the environment as once you've completed it, you can pass it on for someone else to do.”

Not only are puzzles fun for all the family, there's also scientific evidence that proves they're good for you, too.

A number have studies conducted have found that when doing puzzles, the brain goes from its beta state (awake) to the alpha state (which occurs when you're dreaming). A number of possible benefits of the brain shifting from its beta to alpha state include stress easing, a lowered heart rate, and a decrease in blood pressure.

A study published by JAMA Neurology also found that by doing puzzles, it engages the brain and helps avoid the build-up of plaque that's often found in those suffering from Alzheimer's.

“There's puzzles of all different sizes and challenges, and if you've got mobility issues, they're good for helping improve hand-eye coordination,” she adds.

Explaining how the festival will work, Penny says: “People will arrive and they'll be faced with hundreds upon hundreds of puzzles made up and laid out on trestle tables – that way people can see they're complete. Customers



Puzzle fanatics Penny Black, Anne Lewis, Helen Hardy, James Black, Helen Whitelake and Louise Williams

Pictures: SARAH LUCY BROWN





Anne Lewis and Penny Black setting out some of the jigsaws



The puzzle festival will be taking place this weekend



can choose which puzzle they want, and it'll then be disassembled and boxed up, ready for them to go.

"We have 150 different makes of puzzle on offer. We have some from America and Japan, plus the usual British brands like Gibsons. We also have some older, more vintage brands like Arrow and Victory for sale, too."

You name it, there'll be a puzzle for it on the day – whether you're after something historical, photographic, nature-inspired, or even a map.

Penny's puzzles vary in size – ranging from four-piece children's sets to others spanning up to 4,000-pieces.

"We're selling 500-piece puzzles for £2.50, and 1,000-piece puzzles for £3.50," she adds.

With perhaps millions of puzzle pieces all under one roof, the Wyverstone Jigsaw Fair has seen around 70 volunteers assembling

these puzzles in their spare time, ensuring they're ready for the big event this weekend.

"People from across the country have been assembling them on boards, and I've been keeping them stacked at my house, while someone has kept hold of the boxes. None of this would have been possible without our volunteers, along with Friends of St George's Committee, David Black and Son for letting us use the barn, and Mid Suffolk Mobility who supplied us with the cardboard."

There will also be tea, coffee, and homemade cake on sale, as well as a raffle, and jigsaw making with Bacton Community Workshop.

The Wyverstone Jigsaw Festival will take place between 10am and 4pm at Park Farm, Wyverstone, on Saturday April 30, Sunday May 1, and Monday May 2.

Puzzle facts

The largest ever puzzle currently on sale is Grafika's 'Travel Around Art' puzzle, which consists of 54,000 pieces. When completed, it shows an art gallery depicting famous works of art such as Gustav Klimt's 'The Kiss', Monet's 'Poppies' and 'Girl with a Pearl Earring' by Johannes Vermeer. Originally, puzzles started off as dissected maps,

and the first puzzle is credited to cartographer John Spilsbury, who cut up one of his maps in 1762 and gave it to children in local schools to reassemble, to help their with their geography. The term 'dissectologist' refers to someone who enjoys doing puzzles. The Benevolent Confraternity of Dissectologists was established in 1985, and is the UK's largest puzzle enthusiast club.

