



# A slice of the states

LAURA CARTLEDGE heads to Midhurst and finds a community haven serving up more than you expect.



**F**reshly brewed coffee and artisan cakes are two things you may look to enjoy at your favourite café.

However at Fitzcane's, Midhurst, this is just the beginning.

"I love giving them more than they expect," reveals owner Caroline Cheshire. "For me it's about bringing the sense of community back."

This desire sees a wealth of little, seemingly simple, things which add up to an extra special experience.

The free phone charging facilities, after-school homework club and tempting array of local produce is just the tip of this ice-cream café.

A lot of Caroline's inspiration comes from spending nearly two decades living in the States before relocating to Sussex in August 2013.

"The reason we came back was our parents," she explains, adding that ending up in the historic town came about almost by chance.

"We got a map and drew a line between my mother-in-law on the Isle of Wight and my parents near Woking, and Midhurst was right in the middle."

A visit confirmed it would make a great home for all the family and with a small window before her children took the next step with their studies they made the move.

"We had only meant to be in America for a year," Caroline confesses. "We went away with a one year old and a four year old and came back 19 years later with two more kids."

Having spent so much time away, Caroline relished the 'idyllic county life' and set about dividing her time between walking the dogs and doing up their new home.

"I'd painted the place, had new floors put in, it was my dream house," she admits. "But then, on December 23 we flooded."

A staggering 18in of water washed away all of Caroline's hard work and turned the dream home into 'a building site'.

Thankfully something good would come from the devastation as it resulted in Caroline taking the first steps on the path to Fitzcane's.

"I said to myself 'I am going to get a job,'" she recalls. "I thought 'I can't stay here and wait for it to dry out.'"

A search online led Caroline to learn the lease was up on a premises in Grange Road.

"We always used to joke about having our own place," she smiles, in particular somewhere which would fill the gap they felt was left by their favourite ice-cream parlour.

"When we went out for dinner while living in Boston we wouldn't have any dessert at the restaurant as we would go to Captain Dusty's after instead."

Feeling there was 'room for something different' Caroline took the gamble and opened Fitzcane's, which boasts bagels, breakfasts and light lunches as well as iced treats, at the end of September last year.

"It's been a crazy road from the moment we got here," she reflects.

"I believe everything happens for a reason. Now I feel like I am home and I have found my 'thing'."

This sense of connection is reflected in the café's name as Savaric Fitzcane was a fortune hunter from Normandy who was given land, including Midhurst, by King Henry I in 1105.

Bringing the past bang up to date, and mixing two places close to Caroline's heart, sees this historic town's café serve up a slice of stateside – but it hasn't been the culture clash many might expect.

"When people think of America they think of fat people in Hawaiian shirts with cameras around their necks," laughs Caroline. "But Boston, in fact, it is very British."

If the miserable Monday morning I visited Caroline is anything to go by it seems she's struck the perfect balance, as the cosy café buzzes with the chatter of happy customers.

"For me there is nothing worse than going into a café and feeling anonymous. I wanted it to be very bright and welcoming," says Caroline modestly.

"It's been good for me getting to know people having been stuck in the house, I've made some lovely friends."

While it is possible to pinpoint what makes Fitzcane's different, from its dog-friendly approach to the free lending library, it's more than the sum of those things.

In fact I could write this article in three words and they would be - 'just go there'.



For more about Fitzcane's, Grange Road, Midhurst, (next to the Post Office) visit [www.fitzcanes.com](http://www.fitzcanes.com) or call 01730 814612.