

RAMSGATE MATTERS



Celebrating 60 years
of the Ramsgate Society



THE RAMSGATE
SOCIETY

Dedicated to preserving and enhancing
Ramsgate's unique heritage and environment.

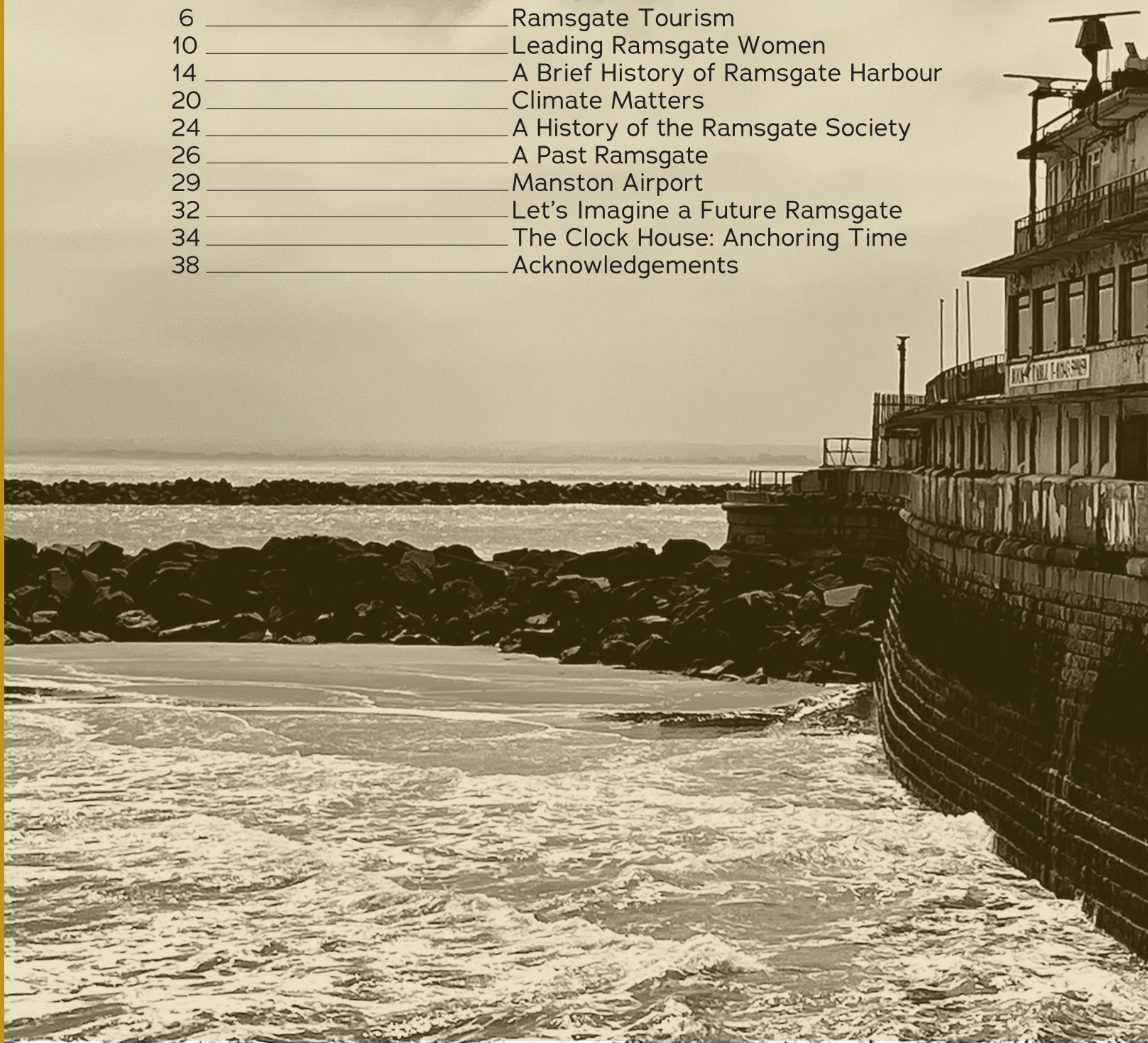


The Ramsgate Society

1964–2024

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A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Who would have thought back in 1964 – when the Beatles were only just starting to rule the world, when BBC2 made it three channels to watch on television, and when we we still thought going to the Moon was a crazy idea – that the newly-formed Ramsgate Society would still be working and making a difference sixty years later.

In 1964, we were dedicated to help preserve and enhance Ramsgate's unique heritage and environment – its architecture, coastal areas, Royal Harbour, and the town as a genuine treasure. In 2024 our aim is very much the same. Technology may have changed many things over the decades, but challenges remain the same; to preserve and cherish what we have, while embracing what's to come.

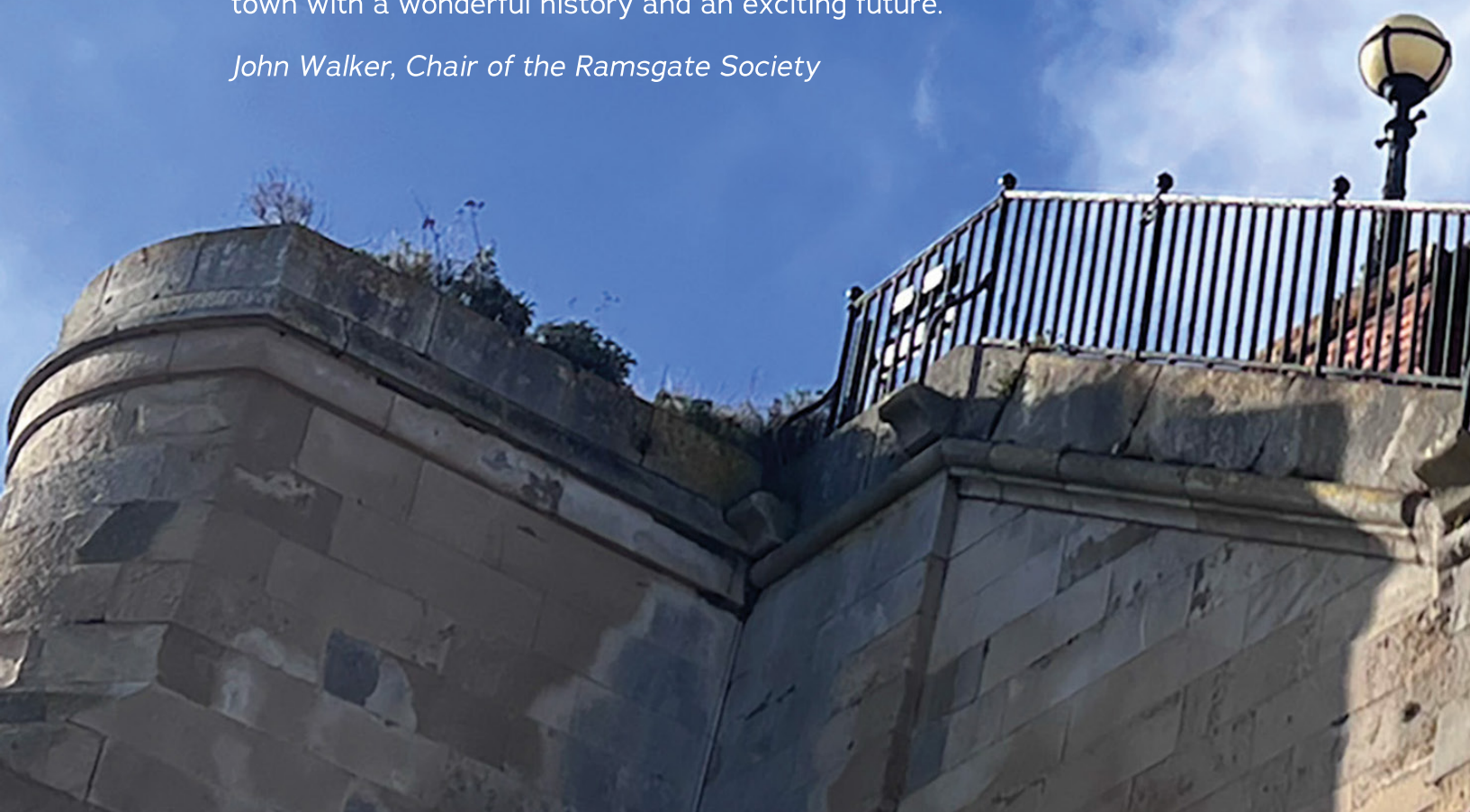
There's an irony with this progress. In an era when we are all looking down at our smart phones, it's never been more important to look up instead – and rediscover what's all around us in Ramsgate. Amazing architecture, beautiful beaches and coasts, the view of the Goodwins and France beyond. Our past and future is all around us, and together it's our collective responsibility to look after it.

Our aims are simple: to protect and improve the quality of life here in Ramsgate, including economic and social well-being, to protect the built and natural environment, and to promote the history and heritage of the town.

This special edition of Ramsgate Matters celebrates the work we have done over the last 60 years, and carries the promise that we will continue to work for the betterment of the town for the next 60 years and beyond.

So, enjoy these articles and thoughts about Ramsgate's past, present, and future – and soak up some new images from around the town. Let's embrace Ramsgate and, for all its quirks and imperfections, love it for what it is – a town with a wonderful history and an exciting future.

John Walker, Chair of the Ramsgate Society





RAMSGATE TOURISM OF THE LAST 60 YEARS: DOWN BUT NOT OUT

The topic of UK seaside tourism often evokes a knee jerk reaction attributing the decline since the 1960s to cheap flights to overseas seaside destinations, but I'll be arguing that the issue is neither as simple nor as depressing as that.

There were many positive indicators in the 1960s that boosted overall holiday numbers:

- Average wages grew faster than prices, particularly for manual workers and young people.
- Paid holiday entitlement grew rapidly for all groups. Workers having two or more weeks grew from 13% in 1964 to 50% in 1969.
- Car ownership more than doubled in ten years from five million in 1959 to 11.2 million in 1969, opening up wider choices on where to go for a holiday break.

On top of these factual elements there was a spirit of optimism and a broadening of horizons. Many more 16 year-olds stayed in education and a rapid growth in 'first generation' university students. Youth culture bloomed in fashion, music and entertainment. The second most popular film in the British box office in 1963 was Cliff Richard in *Summer Holiday* – a movie that contrasted the monochrome dullness of England with a Technicolor sun-filled image of Continental Europe.

Despite the many short term fluctuations, average household disposable income rose more than prices from 1955 to the end of the century. People were more able to afford what they wanted and for many that included a better seaside holiday than was offered by a typical UK resort. Various entrepreneurs saw the possibility of making money by filling new generation planes with more passengers even though each person paid less. It was never going to be easy and with every dip in the economy many cheap airlines failed. Cheap flights were an answer to a need rather than an unwanted imposition that caused all the problems for traditional British seaside resorts.

Ramsgate was among the resorts that suffered badly from the changing needs of holidaymakers. The issues that would bring a decline in our visitors were identified in a survey conducted in 1969 by Chatham Grammar School. Under the direction of economics master, Bill Peppiatt, his students interviewed 1,222 holidaymakers between 5 July and 7 September. Respondents answered questions on behalf of their holiday group and the sample covered 3,500 people staying in the town and 500 day-trippers.

What this study showed was that Ramsgate visitors tended to be poorer and older and while these specific groups were quite enthusiastic about the town, it was the under 35s and better off who tended to say it was no better than

average. Peppiatt commented that “Ramsgate cannot afford to miss out on a changing market or expect to rely on a declining class of visitor”.

Younger and better-off holiday makers looked to overseas holidays for a seaside holiday with more adventure and more reliable weather, plus there was a negative factor that was particularly evident in Ramsgate: over half of Ramsgate holidaymakers in the Peppiatt study were staying in guest houses or unlicensed hotels – more than double the national average. Indeed, AA listings in 1969 showed only four licensed hotels (Court Stairs, San Clu, Foy Boat and Viking Ship) with the Granville having closed in 1946.

The seaside landlady was always a butt of jokes and both holidays abroad and the fast-growing holiday camps at home were a welcome alternative. As holiday numbers to traditional resorts fell, buildings became empty or converted to social services use (often from London), and many shops, bars and restaurants would be forced to close with the decline in summer business.

By 1998, more people had a holiday abroad than in this country and this change hit Ramsgate more than some resorts (for example those of the South West) because it had failed to update its facilities. It was now too much like home when a successful resort must always be different from home. Number of rooms in Hotels and Boarding Houses:

	1961	1971	1981
Thanet	13,589	7,140	4,699
Torbay	5,159	19,830	14,575

Over the last 60 years the attractiveness of Ramsgate for tourists has suffered greatly with the closure of many facilities that could not survive the decline in visitor numbers and as things close the visitor numbers declined again. Facebook communities regularly bemoan the losses of the swimming pool, Pleasurama, Westcliff Hall, Neptunes, Model Village, cinemas, all but one theatre and so much more. But before we get too nostalgic, we must ask ourselves would their return really make so much difference as most would cater for what tourists used to want and not the needs of UK tourism now?

Ramsgate in the 1960s needed to change and it has been painful. Where the local authority had been responsible for creating much of the tourism-attracting infrastructure in the past, their resources have dwindled with limited ability to make any major investments. From 1967 to 1990, poorer areas like most seaside towns, used to receive additional funds from the Rate Support Grant but these grants began to be cut during the Thatcher government and have recently been almost entirely phased out.

It is easy to forget how much of Ramsgate’s historic growth as a tourist resort was local authority led. Right back to the 1890s perhaps the most significant move to open up the town for the growth of mass tourism came with the decision of the local authority to create a thoroughfare along the seafront to link East and West cliffs – taking traffic away from King Street and Queen Street and encouraging a boom in building of accommodation and amenities along both cliffs.

Importantly, these roads were not simply conceived as providing functional access but were also to be tourist attractions in their own right with the embellishment of Pulhamite artificial rocks incorporating gardens and a waterfall on the East Cliff and an imposing new road built over harbour-front arches on the West. Where once they could build, it is now rare for the local authority to even maintain assets in working order! With the exception of occasional grants like Levelling Up funds, financial reality means that the role of local authorities in promoting tourism is more often encouragement of relevant private enterprise and support for community action.

A question for today is 'Does Ramsgate need more tourism?' Some point to the cost of clearing up after holidaymakers and some anti-social behaviour but it is not an either-or choice and efforts to generate more income and employment from other sources are not hampered by also having more people here in the season. Tourism remains important and a study published in November 2022 estimated that some 5,831 Thanet jobs (14% of total employed) were supported by tourism.

Assuming we want to attract more people to stay overnight and to spend money in the town, we have to have the kinds of accommodation that people now want. In this respect, things are already better than they were in the 1960s with twice as many hotels across a range of prices and with modern facilities. More contentious

is the large number of Airbnb and other short-term holiday let properties in Ramsgate. These are criticized for lessening the availability of flats for locals to live in but in many cases, like with the Royal Sands development, the properties are ideal for holiday lets but less suitable for family homes. With the focus on tourism, these facilities are a major asset and will boost the holiday trade and add to council tax income with little call for social and educational council-financed services. This benefit to local authority income will have been enhanced this year with a doubling of council tax on second homes and holiday let properties.

Tourism is also being helped by a growth in civic pride and community action to help fill the gaps in funding for services previously left entirely to the local authorities. The primary

objective of community organisations may have been to make Ramsgate a better place to live, but such activities also make it a more attractive place to visit. We will consider three strands of activity:

- Looking after the physical environment.
- Promoting what is different and interesting about Ramsgate.
- Creating events and experiences that bring people together to enjoy the town.

The look of Ramsgate is vitally important and volunteers play a major role in maintaining gardens, picking up litter and promoting good design for repair and additions to the built environment. We are one of several organisations helping with this work, including many years of taking responsibility for the Edwardian shelters, leading the restoration of the Clock House Museum, planting 50 trees in 2021, and running the Ramsgate Design Awards to encourage attractive new builds and renovations. We also acknowledge the major achievements of other organisations including the revival of Ellington Park, Spencer Square and the gardens of Albion Place and the Winterstoke Promenade.

The competitiveness of Ramsgate to attract tourists is helped by our points of difference over other resorts. Primary among these are harbour and heritage. The harbour and surrounding areas add much to visual difference and this has been advanced by the private development of the near-derelict Pavilion and Pleasurama sites. Apart from keeping a watchful eye on the aesthetics of private



development it is on the promotion of difference through heritage that community groups have been to the fore.

The last 60 years have seen a reopening and development by community action of a major tourist attraction at the Ramsgate Tunnels. There has also been a more widespread appreciation of heritage links to the town through the Pugin Society, Montefiore Heritage and, of course, the Ramsgate Society with its programme of regular talks.

The Ramsgate Society has also been fighting for many years for the renovation of the Clock House Museum – a project that is finally moving forward in association with Thanet District Council following the award of Levelling Up funds from the Government.

Into the next 60 years, the Society has been a part of the team that delivered the 2025 Dunkirk Little Ships Festival, improving commemorative memorials in the harbour. In addition, we partnered with Canterbury Christ Church University and the Council on a Heritage Lottery funded projection mapping project. Using the Clock House Museum as the backdrop, it told the story of Ramsgate's involvement in Operation Dynamo.

The Ramsgate Carnival and beauty queen pageants were established favourites 60 years ago but not significantly different from other Kent resorts. We have a thriving creative community and arts festivals from Summer Squall to the Ramsgate Festival of Sound, but everything tends to be hampered by limited and irregular finance. The battle continues to revive the Addington Street Fair and the Ramsgate Society is among those championing exciting proposals for a Tall Ships Regatta.

To sum up, tourism provides very useful additional income to the town, its people and its businesses but it became evident 60 years ago that it had become stuck in the past and failed to change quickly enough to match emergent holiday wishes. Whilst the distant past relied heavily on local authorities spending money to promote the town, their role is now quite different. We can see what is needed to keep Ramsgate attractive, make it stand out from competitors and to provide reasons to visit but it has to rely much more on private enterprise and community action with local authorities enabling and supporting but no longer able to do everything necessary on its own.

The Ramsgate Society is proud to be one of several community organisations in the town helping to take on that role.

Terry Prue



LEADING RAMSGATE WOMEN

On 23rd September 2023, Ramsgate's eighth woman mayor, Councillor Pat Moore, unveiled the Ramsgate Society's 25th Blue Plaque for Ramsgate's (and Kent's) first woman mayor, Dame Janet Stancomb-Wills. Elected unopposed on 9 November 1923, the centenary of her appointment was also celebrated with articles in the Ramsgate Recorder, a summer party hosted by the Winterstoke Gardens Group, and a Ramsgate Society talk on her life and achievements.

Dame Janet came to live in Ramsgate in 1911 when she inherited her uncle's house on the East Cliff. She joined the Borough Council in 1913 and until her death in 1932, she served the townspeople and donated at least half of her substantial inheritance (around £50 million at today's values) to Ramsgate projects. The lengthy list of her support and generosity includes: electric lighting for the newly opened Ramsgate Library, the town's first motor fire engine, a peace memorial, *Destiny*, for Albion Place Gardens, the landscaping of Winterstoke Gardens, a new children's ward at the Ramsgate General Hospital, nine acres at Jackey Baker's Farm for a recreation ground with funds for amenities, and the land for a new school on Newington Road, now the Dame Janet Primary Academy. In addition, bequests in her will were used to construct the Winterstoke Chine and start the building of the Marina Pool in 1937.

Dame Janet's centenary was the spark for local group, Ramsgate Working History, to seek out other inspirational women from Ramsgate's past. Women and men had built Ramsgate together, but it seemed that women's achievements had often been neglected and overlooked. Around the time the Ramsgate Society was founded, a typical chronology of the humanities of the last 2,000 years would only list only a handful of influential women out of hundreds of men from western art

and literature. A few years later, Linda Nochlin's 1971 ground-breaking essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" set off a chain reaction across history, literature and the social sciences to find these missing figures.

Back in 2022, Ramsgate Working History were finding women everywhere; celebrities and unknowns alike, but all extraordinary



Dame Janet Stancomb-Wills with Sir Ernest Shackleton in the Royal Harbour
(Kent History and Library Centre)

in how they had shaped the arts, sciences and politics. The first point of call was the town's Blue Plaques. Library and online searches found more, and after asking around the community, at the start of 2023 there were 26 names. With a focus on 23 of these, the "23for23: Leading Ramsgate Women" project was launched with a walking trail leaflet of locations and brief biographies. With suggestions from social media, the 'long list' had grown to over 70 by the end of the year.

Dame Janet is joined on the 'long list' by almost 20 philanthropists and campaigners, including Ruth Cousens, who helped establish the Ramsgate Society. According to the Kent Foundation Legend, Thanet was founded in the late 7th century by the "princess saints", Ermenburga and her daughter Mildred at Minster. Lady Augusta Murray, the "original Duchess of Sussex", made the East Cliff her home in 1806. From the Ramsgate Society's talk on Jane Pugin, we found out that after she had returned to The Grange in 1865, her many charitable works earned her the title of "The Grand Old Lady of Ramsgate".

There has been active campaigning for women's suffrage across Thanet since the beginning of the 20th century, and Emmeline Pankhurst of the Women's Social and Political Union had been added to the list for her visits to Ramsgate in 1910 and 1911. However, at a meeting of the Northwood Women's Institute in 2022, members asked for a local suffragette leader to be added. Margaret Sale was the first to organise a Ramsgate branch through the National Union of Women's Societies founded by Millicent Fawcett.

The most poignant moment at the Northwood Women's Institute meeting was when one member said she had met Florence Sutton while attending her dance classes as a child in the 1960s: "Such a lovely, calm person". Florence became the Ramsgate's home front leader in the Second World War, overseeing the town's arrangements for almost 40,000 soldiers evacuated from Dunkirk in 1940, later taking on the day-to-day running of the shelters that are now part of Ramsgate Tunnels. Florence was awarded an MBE in 1941.

Ramsgate has long been the inspiration for artists and performers. It has been reported that Lillie Langtry entertained Edward, Prince of Wales at Royal Villa in Vale Square in the late 1870s. Thespian Dame Lilian Braithwaite is perhaps not well known today, but many will recognise her daughter, Joyce Carey, as the social-climbing station buffet manager in David Lean's 1945 film, *Brief Encounter*. Performer and pioneer of film special effects in the 1890s, Ramsgate-born Laura Bayley was celebrated as part of the Palace Cinema's 2023 "Magic Hours" project.

An article in the summer edition of the Ramsgate Recorder explained how Mary Townley came to be trained by Joshua Reynolds, designed several of Ramsgate's Regency landmarks, and became the UK's first woman architect. Another artist who grew up in Ramsgate, Elizabeth Gould, was trained by Edward Lear, and created ornithological plates for Charles Darwin (also a Ramsgate resident in 1870).

Another artistic connection was uncovered in 2023 between the Impressionist, Berthe Morisot, and the artist, James Tissot – a Blue Plaque marks his stay by the Royal Harbour in 1876. At first, it appeared that Tissot had introduced her to



Florence Sutton (the Sutton Family)

the town, but letters indicate that she had visited the town during her English honeymoon in 1875 and had most likely recommended Ramsgate to Tissot!

Ramsgate has always attracted writers. “23for23” includes global figures such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley and Jenny Marx, but many have been overlooked by their male contemporaries. Lady Judith Montefiore, who was celebrated in an exhibition at the Italianate Glasshouse in September 2023, wrote the first cookery book in English 10 years before Mrs Beeton, Elisabeth Horsell wrote nutritional pamphlets and founded the Vegetarian Society with her husband William at Northwood Villa in 1847, and the First World War poetry of Miriam Gladwell, a successful entertainer and hotelier, is in the Imperial War Museum archive.

Others have been more revered outside the UK. Netta Syrett, an influential first wave feminist, member of Oscar Wilde’s circle, and very successful mainstream author of the day, grew up in Ramsgate’s High Street in the 1880s. She adapted one of her own books for the screenplay for 1936 Hollywood film, *A Woman Rebels*, starring a young Katharine Hepburn.

Jane Austen is probably best known for saying she didn’t like Ramsgate, but evidence suggests the contrary. She visited her brother Francis—later Admiral of the Fleet—when he was stationed in Ramsgate in the early 1800s, and later lived with his wife, a Ramsgatonian, for four years. It is now thought that the location of

her last unfinished novel, *Sanditon*, is based on the town. For the first time in summer 2024, you could experience Jane Austen’s Ramsgate through a guided walk from local company, Walkie Talkie Audio.

All the “23for23” and the Impressionist Berthe Morisot were explored in Thanet Island Discs on Academy FM, the Isle’s award-winning radio station. The lives and legacies of each of the women were discussed and reflected in music and songs over three one-hour desert-island style shows in August 2023.

The final track was for the only author with a Blue Plaque, Sybil Burr who wrote two children’s books set

in Bladsole – a thinly disguised Ramsgate. In the first, *Life With Lisa* (1958), the eleven-year-old protagonist of the title writes about her life imagining an audience of school children in 100 years time. The book was hugely popular: it was reprinted by Puffin Books in 1976, and in 2003 it was serialised on BBC Radio 4.

Sybil’s song, “La Mer” by Charles Trenet, was kindly provided by her family as the author’s own favourite. The last lines, “And with a love song the sea, Has cradled my heart for life”, are perfect for Ramsgate where the Royal Harbour and the sea are at the heart of the town for everyone.

Denise Blunn



Sybil Burr in her Ramsgate garden
(John Murray Press)



A BRIEF HISTORY OF RAMSGATE HARBOUR

Ramsgate originated as a small fishing town in the medieval period, but by the reign of King Henry VII, its harbour was considered to be a limb of the port of Sandwich and, as such, a non-corporate member of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports. A wooden pier is said to have existed during this period, as noted by antiquary John Leland in his *Itinerary*. By the time of Queen Elizabeth I, the town was already trading fish and corn but Baltic trade expanded considerably, particularly between England and Russia.

On 16 December 1748, a violent storm caused ships on the Downs to seek shelter at Ramsgate. Many vessels and lives were saved and the following year petitions were made the House of Commons that Ramsgate be the site chosen for a new harbour. The House duly passed an Act for the construction of a Harbour of Refuge 'proper and convenient' for the reception of ships up to 300 tons. On 4 July 1749 the first meeting of appointed Trustees—including the Rt. Hon. William Pitt Esquire and Sir Francis Dashwood—was held at the Guildhall, London.

A visiting committee to Ramsgate noted the build-up of sewage and the need for a long term solution to deal with the accumulation of silt which so far had been dealt with by men, machines and barges. An advertisement was placed in the *London Evening Post* on 8 August 1749 and, of the many designs received, those of Trustee William Ockenden and Captain Robert Brooke of Margate were accepted.

In less than a month, work on the east pier commenced. Purbeck stone was used in the construction, although the west pier was originally to be built of wood. An inspection committee recommended that ashlar, rather than shell lime, should constitute the backing of the stone pier and the constitution of its mainly chalk core revised by the addition of pebbles in place of mortar. During 1752 it was decided that the west pier would be constructed of stone as with the east. On 14 December 1753 Ockenden submitted a plan to the trustees to contract the harbour to a width of 1,200 feet, offering a financial saving and allowing the west pier to head into possibly deeper water. The approved plan attracted strong local opposition causing the trust to appoint, in 1755, Captains Sir Piercy Brett and J. P. Desmaretz, R.N., to undertake a survey of the harbour and assess the viability of the scheme.

They recommended extending the original line of the piers, removing the works undertaken by Ockenden and sinking a basin 16 feet below the low water spring tide mark, partially enclosed by a stone wall, against the east pier. Work eventually resumed in 1761 but by the end of the decade silting up of the harbour had become a serious issue. In response to this, in 1773 the Board of Trustees invited John Smeaton to provide advice on cleaning and deepening the harbour.

Smeaton, born in Austhorpe near Leeds, was one of the first men to style himself



as a Civil Engineer. His works include the Eddystone Lighthouse, harbours at St Ives and St Austell Bay, and the River Calder Navigation. The following year, he provided a report proposing the construction of a basin to take in the sea water which would be utilised to cleanse the harbour via the use of sluice gates. Examples of the use of sluices in the Low Countries—modern day Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg— and recognition of the considerable rise and fall of the tide at Ramsgate, convinced Smeaton that a basin, filling at high water and releasing its contents during the ebb, offered the best hope of a lasting solution.

To combat the risk of the tidal basin silting up, Smeaton drew up plans for a double basin. Eventually, a variation of the plan was accepted, submitted by Thomas Preston, which involved the construction of a cross wall from the end of the old pier over the whole width of the harbour to the west pier, forming one basin. A failed test of four completed sluices in 1779 led to the modification of timber planking and the construction of flanking stone aprons to prevent rapid undermining of the cross wall during the out-rush of water. The remaining sluices were completed and in operation by the summer of 1781.

When Smeaton died in 1792, the Trustees appointed Samuel Wyatt as his successor. For much of the period from 1793 to 1815, England was at war with France and the harbour was used for the embarkation of troops, horses and equipment. To facilitate this work, the road under the west cliff was improved and renamed the Military Road.

The Royal Harbour was utilised effectively in both the First and Second World Wars. In February 1915 the harbour became a naval base for minesweepers



and patrol boats of the famed Dover Patrol. During the conflict the harbour was attacked by German seaplanes on a few occasions but managed to avoid any major damage. At the start of the Second World War, the harbour was closed and it subsequently became Number 1 Contraband Control Base. Small drifters, based at the harbour, were used for the purpose of dealing with magnetic mines in November and December 1939.

Nearly 2,000 officers and men were drafted into Ramsgate from other ports for Operation Dynamo, which successfully sought to bring back the men of the British Expeditionary Force trapped at Dunkirk. Heavier craft went from Dover, Folkestone and Margate, but Ramsgate had the job of manning hundreds of small boats, invaluable in the shallow waters on the French coast. According to the official Admiralty figures published in 1949, 338,226 troops, including other Allied troops from France and Belgium, were ferried back to England and of the 87,620 that landed in the Isle of Thanet, 39,848 men arrived at Ramsgate.

Although the town suffered severe damage during the Second World War, the harbour escaped comparatively lightly, although many raids were made in an attempt to damage it. At the end of the war repairs were made to the basin and the gates. A new steamer landing stage was officially opened in 1948 at the end of the East Pier utilising the adjacent terminal building built ten years previously. In 1957 the second, more easterly, entrance to the inner harbour was removed.

In April 1966 an international hovercraft service began operating from an apron on the eastern end of the crosswall. The 1980s and '90s saw a progressive separation of leisure aspects – typified by the marina, opened in 1976 – and mercantile/industrial activities (passenger carrying, cargo handling, etc.) at the port, now known as The Port of Ramsgate.

The Royal Harbour, Ramsgate, is listed at Grade II* for the following reasons.

Architectural and engineering interest:

- The harbour is the combined design work of a number of considerable talents in the fields of engineering and architecture including John Smeaton, Samuel Wyatt, John Rennie Senior and John Rennie Junior.
- The use and invention of a number of specialised solutions due to the unique nature and problems posed by the size and location of the harbour.

Historic interest:

- The harbour has played an important role during national events, including the Napoleonic wars, the First World War, when it was a base for the Dover Patrol, and the Second World War, when it was the landing place for many of those soldiers brought home from Dunkirk in the small boats initiative.
- The harbour had a significant part in the development of the town of Ramsgate and its development as a holiday resort in the 19th Century.
- Due to George IV's patronage, the harbour is the only one in England to have received the accolade "Royal Harbour."

In July 2024, the Royal Harbour was designated as a Heritage Harbour, one of only 14 harbours to date to receive this designation. Heritage Harbours is a joint initiative between Historic England, the Maritime Heritage Trust and National Historic Ships, and local groups including the Ramsgate Society. Its aims include: protecting heritage assets, attracting investment and heritage funding, supporting local business growth, increasing tourism and improving community cohesion and inclusion. Heritage Harbours supports the safeguarding and conservation of the UK's most historic coastal and waterway location, along with the buildings, quays, shipyards and environments that make them special.

John Walker



Brian S. Gould, 1975
From the collection of the Clock House Museum



CLIMATE MATTERS

The suggestion that man-made emissions were causing changes to the Earth's climate was presented to a US Congressional Committee in 1988 by a young climate scientist named James Hansen. He warned of the dangers of climate breakdown caused by the burning of fossil fuels and the profound consequences that might arise.

In December 1990 the United Nations General Assembly launched negotiations leading to an international treaty, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) being signed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with the agreement coming into force in 1994.

The UNFCCC is a framework for international cooperation to combat climate change by limiting average global temperature increases and the resulting climate change, and coping with impacts that were, by then, inevitable. There are now 197 Parties to the Convention who meet yearly for the Conference of the Parties (COP).

At the Ramsgate Society 'Away Day' in October 2021, the Committee identified climate change and the green agenda as a new strand of work that should be pursued, with the aim of viewing all Ramsgate Society projects through the 'lens' of climate change and considering it as an essential criterion for prioritising and evaluation.

In November 2022 I was co-opted to the Ramsgate Society Executive Committee to lead on Climate Change and the Environment, coinciding with the Sharm el-Sheikh Climate Change Conference – COP27.

The five key takeaways from COP27 were:

- Establishing a dedicated fund for loss and damage for vulnerable countries.
- Maintaining a clear intention to keep 1.5C within reach.
- Holding businesses and institutions to account.
- Mobilizing more financial support for developing countries.
- Making the pivot towards implementation.

Climate change has massive implications for human existence from the large scale of extreme weather events and sea-level rise, to the individual level of coping with higher temperatures, food supply disruption, and the changes to daily lifestyle activities such as travel.

In the UK, we are fortunate that our temperate, maritime climate is much less affected by climate change than many other world regions, but even here the effects are starting to be felt, with flooding, storms, changing seasons and damaging effects on our native flora and fauna.



On a local level, the Society has the ability to input into and influence decision-making affecting all of us in Ramsgate and the wider Thanet area and, increasingly, climate change is a key part of those decisions. As well as considering the impact on our built environment, and the often conflicting challenges of maintaining our historic fabric whilst improving energy efficiency (for example, affordable double-glazing in Georgian properties) the Society has been active in commenting on, and advocating for or against larger projects, such as the proposal to re-establish Manston (Kent International) Airport and the siting of a National Grid landfall station within the Pegwell Bay SSSI and Minster Marshes protected wetland as part of the Sea Link electricity interconnector project.

Our other aims include informing our membership and the wider community of the science behind climate change and refuting the increasingly prevalent amount of misinformation being spread by those with an axe to grind - particularly fossil fuel interests.

After many years of refuting the existence of anthropomorphic (change caused by human activities) climate change the deniers have now, by and large, become 'delayers'; accepting the premise of climate change but arguing against 'hasty' action that would 'cause hardship to ordinary people'.

Unsurprisingly, the science shows that the earlier action is taken, the more likely it is to be successful. Internal documents circulated by major oil companies show that they have been aware of the environmental consequences of burning oil since James Hansen's presentation to Congress, but they have been utilising the



Eroded cliffs at Pegwell Bay

obfuscatory skills honed by the tobacco industry to hide their culpability.

Unfortunately, delay simply means that significant changes to the planet's climate systems (and associated events such as sea level rises) are already guaranteed, and the mission has become more about damage limitation (amelioration) rather than prevention. We are seeing the effects across the world with more severe storms, flooding, forest fires, drought and rising sea levels. Meanwhile people in low-lying regions, such as Bangladesh and some of the Pacific islands, are already having to move permanently from their homes as they vanish beneath the water.

As part of our quest to inform and educate there is now a "Climate Matters" column as a regular feature in the monthly newsletter. Among the subjects we have covered already are Common Myths, Sorting Fact from Fiction, proposed Sea Link connector station on the Minster Marshes, Technological fixes for Climate Change, Climate Change, and Sustainability.

In addition to climate articles there has also been one on a sea-turtle sanctuary in Cape Verde, and one featuring the water-bottle filling station installed last year at Ramsgate Main Sands to aid plastic bottle reuse, a joint effort between the Society and Ramsgate Town Council grant-aided by the marine conservation charity Sea-Changers. As a member of the Ramsgate Town Council Climate Change Task Force Group I also interface between the Society and the Town Council.

The Society also hosted a presentation, as part of the nationwide Big Green Week, on the Green Plaque Scheme, which seeks to encourage more sustainable living by providing an environmental assessment of your home and how you live in it.

As individuals the biggest contribution we can make to a sustainable lifestyle is to reduce our consumption. Increasing the efficiency of our cars and appliances doesn't help fight climate change if use goes up, or they get bigger. Much of the energy savings over the past few years have been nullified simply because more people are doing more things and using more stuff. Naturally, the problems are particularly acute in the richest countries but the effects are felt most in the poorest and most vulnerable places on Earth.

Simple actions like not buying bottled water dramatically reduce plastic pollution, hence the Society's support for a water bottle refill station on Ramsgate Main Sands. Initiatives such as this have multiple benefits. A water station reduces the amount of plastic that is manufactured and therefore thrown away, thus reducing littering on our beautiful beaches, improving sustainability and reducing the amount of plastic transported across the oceans to be dumped in poorer countries around the world. A water station doesn't sound like a big challenge to plastic waste, but Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust estimate savings of 150,000 plastic bottles a year by the installation of just four water bottle refill stations. Imagine that reproduced across the country!

The Ramsgate Society will continue to advocate for sustainable, climate friendly improvements to our immediate lived environment and hope that you will all join us in doing your bit to help.

Phil Shotton

A HISTORY OF THE RAMSGATE SOCIETY: SCRATCHING THE SURFACE

The first Ramsgate Society was a friendly society, created for single ladies, to protect them and their resources long before women's rights and equality were established.

In 1957 Duncan Sandys, a former son-in-law of Winston Churchill and father of the former MP for South Thanet, Laura Sandys, founded the Civic Trust. It aimed to improve the quality of new and historic buildings and public spaces and help improve the general quality of urban life. In keeping with these aims the Ramsgate Society was formed in 1964. Sadly, the Civic Trust went into administration in 2009 but in 2010 Civic Voice took over the role of national charity for the civic movement in England, counting the Ramsgate Society as one of its members. Our Chair, John Walker, had spoken often with Griff Rhys Jones promoting the concept and continues to do so.

The Civic Trust sought "To ensure that the built environment meets the real needs of a community, its families, individuals, its heritage, and the natural ecosystems on which society depends for survival." One of the aims of the Society is "Promoting the history and heritage of the town". In 2017 the Society was instrumental in securing Heritage Action Zone status for Ramsgate. The programme helped extend the history of Ramsgate and its surrounding area back beyond written history. It is not just about the built environment any more than the town is just a collection of buildings. It's also about the spirit of a place - how it feels as well as how it looks, its history, attractiveness, and the emotional connection people have with it. Ramsgate has all this in spades and perhaps that's why it has attracted personalities as wildly different as Augustus Pugin, Karl Marx, and Sir Moses Montefiore?

Today, the Society works with schools, community groups and charities far wider than its membership. Activities include tree planting, litter picking, landscaping, town planning and design, signage, transport, parking, wildlife, nature, sport and leisure, transport, coastal issues and public talks. Ramsgate is a special place, shaped by its location, its history and by its people. Similarly, the Ramsgate Society is not just a formal committee and membership but a collection of people and projects - reflecting a remarkable town.

Brian Daubney



Inside St. George's Church tower

A PAST RAMSGATE

Monumental Ramsgate

If Ramsgate is older than Stonehenge, where are the ancient monuments? The answer is right here, in the traces of four built-up causewayed enclosures that stood in a line during the early Neolithic period, visible from the sea to the east, west and south. The fourth was only identified in 2018 when Historic England carried out an aerial survey for Ramsgate Heritage Action Zone. Originally constructed from earth and wood, they were probably abandoned around 3,600 years ago, eroding over time so that only their ghostly imprints are left on the landscape.

Our greatest monuments are of course the white chalk cliffs, the final stretch of the longest continuous chalk reef. These monumental cliffs witnessed sea worship; passing Phoenician traders, Roman, Viking, and Norman invasions; threats from the Spanish Armada and the Luftwaffe; Little Ships to giant wind farms.

Being built on chalk means that traces of early settlements disappeared but chalk itself is a useful medium in mortar and cement as lime, a constituent of Roman concrete which has been in use from at least 150BC and has the ability to set under water. (It is not the same as Roman Cement which was developed in the 1780s and patented in 1796 by James Parker of Northfleet, Kent.) Chalk was used in the construction of Ramsgate Harbour while inland, blocks of chalk were used in the construction of walls.

The chalk cliffs of Ramsgate are striped with bands of flint and our beaches are littered with curiously shaped stones, the hard, fossilised remains of burrowing organisms that died between 60 and 100 million years ago.

In the Stone Age, about 5,000 years ago, flint was knapped, chipped or chiselled. Flint tools, knives, arrow and axe heads, were universal tools and exported far beyond Britain. Chippings were later in use to reinforce mortar. The largest known English flint workings at Grimes Graves in Norfolk had 400 shafts sunk at three levels down to 9 metres. The lower the layer of flint, the darker and harder it was. Flint from the third and lowest layer was the darkest black flint with a jewel like quality that could be used for ceremonial pieces and decorative axe heads.

Flint mines are rightly regarded as some of the rarest neolithic monuments. But in Ramsgate, where, on occasion, the beaches are covered with the knobbly nodules, black flint is so common that, like the cliffs, we hardly notice it. You can see it in the walls and buildings all over the town - from the Shrine of St Augustine on the West Cliff to the distinctive walls of the Montefiore Estate on East Cliff where it was edged with red brickwork.

A Stone-Age Street

There is evidence of human activity over more than 5,000 years in what we now know as Ramsgate. Yet the Town is best known for its 18th century Royal Harbour. Although crowded and busy, the Harbour and the adjacent 20th century port are constantly criticised for not being profitable.

Perhaps we could learn from elsewhere? When 2022 figures from 400 historic sites were published, they showed an unexpected rise in visitor numbers. Ten locations had their highest numbers since records began and six sites had their biggest number of visitors in the last ten years. None are conventional 'attractions'. The recently restored Strawberry Hill in Twickenham enjoyed tenfold increase. Chatham has spent 40 years recovering from closure of its Dockyard but those Dockyards are now thriving visitor attractions where one of the most visited attractions is the 400-year-old rope walk. The authorities were sure no one was interested in rigging and planned to rip it out. An important factor in its restoration was the film that was made before its planned destruction. This record proved invaluable for the restoration and has become part of the 'story of place'.

It takes time to work out how a place best fits with its past and present. Ramsgate is rich in stories, many of them easily overlooked. A weird map of ice age mud filling the valleys of what are now Ellington, High Street and King Street shows the source of material for the bricks used to create the first Brick Street (now Effingham Street).

Maps don't really show how two and a half million years of repeated ice ages carved out these valleys, nor how a hundred thousand years ago, early human beings emerged as the ice slowly retreated. They survived by 'impacting on mammal species' - eating prehistoric mammoths and aurochs whose tusks, horns and bones were found buried in clay along King Street and the end of Brick Street. The cliffs on either side of the sudden cleft created by the valleys broke through to what is now the harbour. They were high enough to send ancient mammals to their deaths in the valleys below trapping them in the soft clay below as a source of food for the residents of what was effectively a street in a dying stone age. The natural harbour where cleft met sea changed over time; the remains of a Roman quay still lie 20 feet below the 'modern' slipway built in 1836.

The street to the harbour became the home of the retired Admiral William Fox. His sister and neighbour was Harriet Tomson, a widow and for thirty years the owner and master brewer of England's oldest brewery. Overlooking the street from one of the cliffs beside it was William Curtiss, Mayor of London and one of the first private owners of a fire engine. After the Admiral died his mansion became the Town Fire Station, at first only for nearby wealthy residents.

Later, Dame Janet Stancomb-Wills, first female Mayor of Ramsgate, equipped the fire station with motorised fire engines. Dame Janet also erected the first female war memorial to all who suffered in the war, including women, horses, dogs and birds. The statue—once called *Destiny*—is of a goddess of the sea, worshipped here in prehistory.

More recently, Derek Molock lived in a small house at the top of the street from where he typed and delivered a paper called *The East Kent Critic*. Derek became Chair of Kent County Council and campaigned to form a Society to preserve the town's past. Today, the Ramsgate Society is dedicated to protecting and enhancing our built and natural environment and public realm.

An Ancient Gateway

In a lecture given in 2017, Gerald (Gez) Moody, Director of the Trust for Thanet Archaeology, described how Thanet's many burial sites not only outnumber those

at Stonehenge but are much earlier. A map of showing the exceptional extent, and density of these coastal burial grounds is on display at the Dover Museum, where the main exhibit is one of the earliest known seagoing vessels, a rare survivor from the Bronze Age and one that could easily have sailed the waters around Ramsgate.

In 2019, Jonathan Last from Historic England gave a talk on prehistory and how, as the Royal Harbour Approach Road was being built in 1995, a Neolithic causewayed enclosure had been found at Chalk Hill. More recently the remains of a second enclosure had been identified at Court Stairs and an aerial survey for Ramsgate Heritage Action Zone found the outline of a third causewayed enclosure, in line with the other two. All three predate Stonehenge. Built-up causewayed enclosures are usually found singly, sometimes in pairs but three enclosures in a line, less than a kilometre apart, had not been identified before.

Research shows that the earliest known ports around the world – in the Gulf, Mediterranean, Gujarat and Indonesia -were invariably associated with major sea routes and with burial grounds. Many of their names have similar meanings: 'Mound of the Dead' is found at Lothall in Gujarat and Mohenja Dara in Pakistan while Dilmun, at Bahrain, has 400 acres of domed tombs with 11,774 burials dating from 4,000 BCE and translates as 'Land of the living.' The Phoenician port of Byblos in the Lebanon had a Royal necropolis in its limestone cliffs and traded in cedar wood, copper, tin and Tyrian purple dye over the known world.

Ramsgate, in Thanet, has been linked with *Thanetos* (death personified in Greek). It was a prehistoric landing place on an island of burial sites at point where major sea routes intersected. with. Radiocarbon analysis of evidence of metal working and agriculture has found dates close to 3,500 BCE and the early Bronze Age, a time when Britain traded in tin, lead, iron and copper, along with amber (originally from the Baltic although often found on Thanet beaches after winter storms).

The book *At The Great Crossroads* describes how major sea routes intersected offshore from the cliffs above Sandwich Bay indicated the entrance to the Wantsum, the river that made Thanet an island and gave safe passage between the English Channel and the North Sea. This is the area that was described by the Venerable Bede as 'The Gateway'. He was writing the first history of the English-speaking people, calling the country Britain after the name of a northern tribe.

What Bede meant by 'Gateway' was almost certainly the point of entry for prehistoric tribal arrivals, the Romans and St Augustine. He had no interest in defining the mass of incomers from Europe: Keltoi, Belgics, Gauls and others that used the same Gateway to reach the Thames and North Sea, adding to the complicated but pivotal development of England's Gateway.

Brian Daubney

MANSTON AIRPORT PROPOSALS & THE RAMSGATE SOCIETY

Looking back to Manston airfield sixty years ago, it was viewed as ultimately having a proud and distinguished history during the Second World War. In the Cold War era of the 1950s it was given over to the USAF. It finally quit at the end of the decade in no small part to the intolerable noise inflicted by their military jets on the population of Ramsgate.

In the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, under RAF stewardship, there were low levels of activity search and rescue, cross channel commercial hops, and Fire Service school. The RAF finally relinquished the site in 1998. Then began an era of a succession of private sector attempts to provide airline passenger and cargo services. Each was a commercial failure. Over a period of 15 years to final closure in 2014, cumulative losses were around £100 million.

A developer bought the 742 acre site in 2014. It subsequently submitted an application to Thanet District Council for a mixed residential, business and leisure scheme known as Stone Hill Park. This included provision up to 4,000 houses. The Council turned down the application in favour of reserving the site for aviation use. This prompted RiverOak Strategic Partners to come forward stating their intention to reopen the airport as an international hub for air freight and associated passenger services. They duly applied for a Development Consent Order from the Planning Inspectorate as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. Stone Hill Park interests subsequently sold the site to RiverOak.

The Executive Committee of the Ramsgate Society were keen to engage in each of the three rounds of preceding consultations in 2017, 2018 and 2019 and made written and oral submissions to the Planning Inspectorate hearings held January to July 2019.

Should RiverOak be granted a Development Consent Order to re-open Manston airport on the basis of



its application? In order to come to our own view the Committee drew up a chain of key conditions that would need to be met:

- There is a current and long term need for greatly increased air cargo capacity within the South-East (and in the UK as a whole).
- The specific need is best met by a new dedicated air cargo hub (as opposed to other means).
- Manston is the best site and location in the UK for that air cargo hub.
- RiverOak has a robust, sustainable, stress tested business plan, demonstrating the airport would have short, medium, and long-term commercial viability.
- The adverse impacts and damage to population health, well-being, educational attainment, natural environment, built environment, heritage assets, culture and economy through noise, air pollution, safety risks and congestion stemming from the planned scale of airport operation are demonstrably outweighed by local, regional and national benefits.

On the basis of our own research it became clear that the RiverOak application could not meet any of these conditions. The weakness of their case and the cumulative evidence from aviation experts at the hearings in 2019 confirmed and strengthened our view.

A cargo hub airport would not be viable due to lack of regional and national demand, restricted catchment area, poor road accessibility, availability of capacity at existing airports for any growth.



The Planning Inspectorate advised against approval of the Development Consent Order. Despite the overriding evidence the Department for Transport, headed by Grant Schapps as Secretary of State, approved the application, but deemed in law to be with insufficient justification. Redetermination approval came in August 2022. There then followed two judicial reviews challenging the decision. The final appeal against the granting of the Development Consent Order was dismissed in May 2024. Ultimately, by law the Secretary of State has the final say, and thus the Order now stands approved. Political considerations overrode the evidential case.

The way is by no means clear for RiverOak to forge ahead with redevelopment of the site. In particular

there are two potential ‘show stoppers’ the reside on the critical path: the Airspace Change Proposal, and relocation of the RAF’s High Resolution Direction Finder.

RiverOak needs to gain approval of an Airspace Change Proposal to establish airspace and operating procedures for flights to and from Manston. Airspace change is regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority. The application by RiverOak must follow the seven stage CAP 1616 process. RiverOak has to date completed just two stages after failing to get approval of their “Gateway Assessment” in April and August 2021. Completion of the CAP 1616 process does not guarantee approval by the Civil Aviation Authority of airspace change.



The relocation of the Finder is a mandatory condition of the Development Consent Order and a vital component in a national military aviation navigational network. The current location would obstruct airport redevelopment.

The Finder location requirements are technically demanding such that so far three proposals from RiverOak have been rejected by Ministry of Defence. There is still no agreement despite the mandatory requirement being clear to RiverOak in 2019. At that time it was stipulated that not only must the Finder to be resited, but that the new one was to operate successfully for not less than two years in parallel with the existing installation before the existing could be decommissioned and removed.

Since 2019 at the latest, RiverOak has been fully aware of these two potentially show-stopping issues that sit on the critical path to the reopening of Manston. Over the last five or more years there has seemingly been very little investment in time and effort to resolve the matters. The assertion by RiverOak that “The airport will be ready to receive flights in 2028.” lacks credibility.

We detect a growing cynicism, even among original supporters, that RiverOak is not really committed to reopening Manston. They keep “kicking the can down the road”. We do not expect to see Manston reopen as a cargo hub, nor would we wish to.

A major consequence of this unfolding saga is the ‘opportunity cost’. One cannot help but look back on the 2017 proposal from Stone Hill Park for a mixed use development that was refused and the consequential loss of prime agricultural land as the alternative in pursuit of government housing targets.

Richard Oades

LET'S IMAGINE A FUTURE RAMSGATE... IN 60 YEAR'S TIME, WHAT MIGHT WE SEE?

- A vibrant harbour town - Ramsgate Royal Heritage Harbour - buzzing with the intersection between the unique heritage features, the maritime community, visitors from across the UK and Europe and providing jobs and leisure opportunities for local community.
- A flourishing arts and culture scene which attracts an audience from across the South of England.
- An active, open port supporting trade and tourism with Europe and other UK destinations.
- Lifts reopened to increase accessibility between the town and the beaches.

- Clean pavements - each dog followed by personal poo robot who not only bags the deposits also collects and disposes of the bags.
- A town centre of busy shops - with the estate agents unable to keep up with the demand for commercial buildings.
- Westwood Cross pedestrianised with a centralised parking/transport hub and a quick and easy route between each megastore via a series of moving walkways.
- Public transport.... Flexible route mini shuttles - think “Johnny Cab” from the film *Total Recall*.
- Perhaps more likely is The Loop. Still going and serving people across Thanet... with new feature that keeps the buses spread out across the timetable and prevents them arriving within 4 mins of another Loop (we all know how they like to travel in packs).
- Ramsgate, Margate, and Broadstairs all having carved out their own identities within a thriving Thanet.

So what role can we imagine for Ramsgate Society in 2085?

- An essential hub organisation bringing together local authorities, commerce and community – with eyes on the past, present, and future of Ramsgate.
- Linked to local community interest companies and charities, supporting and creating opportunities for co-operation and collaboration.

Sophie Clissold-Lesser

THE CLOCK HOUSE: ANCHORING TIME

A lone sentinel of time surges above the English Channel in the historic town of Ramsgate. Where strong gales whistle stories of lost verses into the unforgiving waves, and salt-thick mist looms a shroud of forgotten tales. The Clock House stands wise, its storied bricks heavy with the responsibility of all it has witnessed yet never revealed. Time itself has chosen to settle here, resting within the steady tick of its hands, brushing against those who've crossed its threshold. And yet, how strange to consider that our ancestors—spanning countless ages, might have felt its very gaze. The same one that meets our eyes now, the same that will endure into the unknown tomorrow.

Birth of a Landmark

Ramsgate's tide draws back into a humble fishing and farming hamlet. The name being whispered between the lines in the Kent Hundred Rolls of 1274-5 as 'Ramisgate' or, 'Remmesgate' – derived from Anglo-Saxon 'Hræfn's geat' meaning 'ravens cliff gap.' By 1357, it rose into 'Ramesgate,' a title surged from the salt-stained tongues of its people. In the quiet crevice of the South East, the village endured a serene soundness through the centuries, until a ferocious storm in 1748 crashed its shore and sparked a shift. By 1749 a harbour, envisioned as a Harbour of Refuge, began to take shape.

As the 19th century dawned, the town stirred with new-found ambition, its gaze fixed on modernity as the Clock House took its first breath. In 1805, its tick resonated across Ramsgate Harbour, born from the mind of Samuel Wyatt, the Harbour's engineer, who was entrusted to design a watchhouse crowned with a clock tower above—a lookout, set to stand over the ever-changing tides it will watch over.

Wyatt's deputy, M.G. Louch drafted the drawings to bring his vision to life. Beneath the storied bricks, the harbour was alive with activity: fishermen grappling with nets heavy with cod, shipwrights hammering planks into vessels heading for distant shores, and merchants haggling beneath a sky brushed with Regency optimism.

This was a town on the brink of transformation—its harbour soon to be christened with the "Royal" prefix from King George IV in 1821. The Clock House, grounded in timeless watch, traced more than time; it documented Ramsgate's ascent, its eyes pointed across a horizon where past and future met in the crash of every wave.

Metamorphosis: Transformation Over Time

By the 1820s, a modest shift stirred within the sturdy frame of the Clock House, coinciding with the completion of the harbour and the conferral of its "Royal" crown in 1821. Ramsgate basked in this newfound sense of glory, and the Clock

House chimed to honour its dawn. After Wyatt's passing in 1807, John Rennie succeeded him and raised the profile of the building—upper floors ascending on the wings between 1817 and the early 1820s. Its silhouette stretched upward, its form crashing against the tidal roar. Within the cracks of the walls, Lieutenant Matthew Curling Friend spoke of the Ramsgate Meridian—five minutes and 41 seconds ahead of Greenwich, unveiled to Sir William Curtis. By July, 1817, the Clock House stood whole, its growing bones settling against the Ramsgate tides.



But even as the tower gazed at the waves, something new ploughed through the earth. In 1826, iron tracks snaked themselves into Ramsgate with the Chatham line, a vein of steam and steel pulsated from London's industrial heart. Britain's wheels had turned—coal blackened the skies, and wealth poured into the cities. Now, prosperity crashed seaward, craving salt air and cool waves. The Clock House observed as Ramsgate shed its old scales: cod-heavy nets gave way to steamship whistles, and the calls of fishermen tangled with the sharp clatter of tourist boots. By 1825, the Kent Coast Railway pierced the town's heart, tracks kissing the waves. Parasols bloomed, villas crowned the cliffs, and bathing machines trundled shoreward—a refuge reborn with wealth and promise.

As the 20th century dawned, time marched forward, and with it came the wars—their shadows spilling across Ramsgate's cobbled streets. By 1915, the First World War had churned the town into a naval whirlwind, its once warm harbour plummeting into freezing temperatures as warships and taut supply chains docked. The Clock House, its hands dusting off the gritty air shaken loose by Zeppelin bombs, presided over the din—unruffled as explosions caved the cliffs and rattled windows. It ticked through the turmoil, a metronome to a world off-key, its gears grinding as if trying to survive the discord below.

Then came the Second World War, striking harder. In 1940, with Britain fighting for an inch of life and Dunkirk's desperate retreat of the "Little Ships" just unfolding beyond its waves, the Harbour of Refuge housed 40,000 soldiers who landed on Ramsgate's sand. The Clock House, now a veteran of war's relentless nature, barely flinched. It loomed like a stubborn symbol of the town, documenting every moment while sirens wailed their shrill chorus. The war may have dulled the town's spirit, but the Clock House kept it beating—a weathered heartbeat, pulsing hope throughout the war-torn minds.

In 1984, the Clock House sighed into stillness, its clock hands slowing as it laid down its mantle as the Ramsgate Maritime Museum. Within its familiar embrace, it had housed two seafaring souls: the 1946 steam tug Cervia, a huffing relic of steam and steel, and a courageous rescuer of the sea, the 1912 Sundowner, a



survivor of Dunkirk. But time draws back like the tide—Sundowner setting sail to Dennetts Shipbuilders in Chertsey.

The Museum stirred anew in 2012, roused by the Steam Museum Trust. No government funded the revival; instead, it was cradled by the hands of volunteers and a nod from Thanet District Council. In 2021, it fell asleep, awaiting for a grand renewal. By 2026, it swears to rise—a museum and heritage hearth, its tick a song for Ramsgate's remembrance.

The Future: What's Next?

Now, in the year 2025, the Clock House stands as a Grade II listed relic stitched into Ramsgate's maritime tapestry—a conqueror of time, every crack carved with salt and stories. Time in the clock hands ever so gently sleeps, peacefully snoring out whispers of reinvention. The Ramsgate Society embraces its future, longing for the bricks to let out a big breath within its walls once more. Imagine it: the long creak of its oak beams waking up to new footsteps, its hands sweeping dust from a horizon that has been left unwritten.

The sea beyond churns restless, a common theme for this town, but now its foam drags along the sand like grasping hands, begging for a town tilting toward tomorrow. Villas fade, teahouses give way to cafés, yet the Clock House remains—a stubborn anchor, its large shadow casting across a Ramsgate reborn. As the sun rises, the tower catches its blush, its bricks heavy with wars and carved messages, a chance for it to be lightened with laughter, with hands similar to ours tracing its cracks—not as scars, but as veins of a life still flowing.

And as for the younger eyes who gaze up? We see not just a random building, but a mirror—reflecting a past we inherit and a future we shape. Whenever we pass the Clock House, our eyes peer on its wrinkled face. It's as if the stories clawing to escape are roaring—desperate, restless—but a silent hand muffles their cry. I ache to see this timeless relic, the Clock House, polished anew—its dusty hands gleaming once more. We yearn for Ramsgate's heritage, a thread spun through generations, to ripple down in shared conversations and salt-stained pride.

So the Clock House stands, its hands tracing not just hours, but the pulse of Ramsgate itself—ink scribed down in salt and storm. From Wyatt's vision to the scars of war, exhaling tales we yearn to hear. Imagine a child in 2050, fingertips brushing bricks where a child of 1817 once lingered—an unknown bridge spanning centuries. Will that child catch its murmur, the soft hum of time trapped in between the foundations depths? Not quite. The Clock House holds its tongue, yet it calls like a siren offshore. "Come, weave your strand into my endless tapestry, the wind carrying the tick through the crashing waves, here I stand, our echo across the tides."

Brooke Sinclair & Arianne Tabrizi

THE RAMSGATE SOCIETY

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CONTACT:

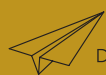
The Ramsgate Society
Custom House
Harbour Parade
Ramsgate CT11 8LP

secretary@ramsgate-society.com

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