

Margate.

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Margate was inhabited from at least the Iron age. A male skeleton was found when the foundations to the new police station were being excavated and he was dated to the Iron age. Later there is extensive evidence of Roman occupation, including a roman villa discovered in Tivoli Garden Park in the 1920's. Evidence of dwellings in and around the site of present-day Margate come from records of Minster Abbey a short journey inland. These settlements were under attack from the Danes from the 8th to the 10th century.

Margate, or Meregat, was a natural harbour used for fishing, smuggling as well as trade. It was incorporated into the Cinque ports during the reign of Edward the Confessor, 1042-1066. The Cinque ports, which like modern 'Free Ports' paid less tax, illegally began 'taking over' smaller ports and Margate became part of Dover. Margate did not become a separate place until its incorporation in 1857. The port was of considerable importance, in 1225 one Ricardus was given a licence to export grain from the fertile Isle of Thanet. It was an Island during Roman times, maybe tidal. During time the cliffs eroded and there was a constant and expensive fight against the sea's encroachment. There is an order to repair a pier in 1615 so a pier was, clearly, in place sometime before this date. The Pier was rebuilt in 1646. Later in 1824 the 'Jarvis Landing Stage' was built of wood some 1100 feet in length. The Harbour Arm was built of Stone in 1810 -15 and secured the Harbour against the rough weather. Eugenius Birch in 1853 began to build his first Pier, the first Iron Pier in England which was completed in 1855 only to suffer damage over the years from shipping and gales. The severe gale of 1978 finished it off leaving the lifeboat station separated from the pier. The pier was finally dismantled in 1998. The little building at the beginning of the Pier, Droit House, remains as an attractive reminder of elegant Victorian engineering.

The brand-new pier was built at a time when the pilgrimage from London to the seaside was by way of Paddle Steamers, the first Paddle Steamer arrived in 1815, was at its height. The steamers would take crowds from London down the Thames to Southend and from there to Margate in the South and Great Yarmouth to the North as well as many other places enroute. The paddle steamers struggled from the beginning of the 20th century as rail, which arrived

in Margate via a complex route in 1846 with a simpler route opened in the 1920's and road transport became cheaper and quicker. Regular steamers from Southend continued to serve Margate, which was a gateway to the more genteel resorts of Broadstairs and Cliftonville, into the sixties. London to Southend paddle steamers were revived with the 'Waverly' Paddle steamer in the 1980's.

The great urge to visit the Seaside, for medical reasons began in the 1730's and became fully established in 1752, when Dr Richard Russell published his book 'Dissertation on the use of Seawater in the Diseases of the Glands', which advocated both the benefits of sea-bathing and the drinking of seawater. Wealthy City dwellers rushed to the seaside, including Margate, which was close to London. The Thames and sailing ships, called Hoys, made travel by water possible rather than a bone jarring road trip.

An influx of visitors, in the early days wealthy visitors, required places to stay and be entertained. The development of Margate followed the path of most early seaside resorts. Firstly, a Georgian square of elegant houses, Cecil Square followed by The Royal Hotel and Assembly rooms and Hawley Square. By 1800 the population was 4,771. As demand grew so did the building. The Theatre Royal in 1787 and still going strong. A very elegant Terrace on the road between Westbrook and Margate in 1806. 1911 and the Winter Gardens opened with the greats appearing on stage, Laurel and Hardy, Vera Lynn and the Beatles. In 1914 the Walpole Hotel a monument to Edwardian plush opened. Dreamland the brainchild of 'Lord' George Sanger opened in 1920. A vast area for fairground entertainment including a big dipper!

Dr Russell believed that submersion in seawater was a great cure all together with drinking sea water. Bathing machines were quickly invented, Scarborough about 1730, but Benjamin Beale invented a canvas hood which could be pulled down their by giving privacy as men and women dipped naked. A single gent, with a guide, to stop you drowning, cost.1/6d in the 1770's. Eventually it was ruled that Ladies and Gentleman's Machines should be 60feet apart and that Ladies should be provided with suitable dresses and Gentleman should wear draws.

Margate went a stage further and built a sea bathing Hospital in 1791, now mostly flats. Sea bathing and sea air were considered the best cure for TB. Patients beds were pushed out into the fresh air and there was sea water to bath in. The Sea Bathing Hospital was evacuated to South Hill Park in WW11.

Whitsun Weekend, 1968, was the great Mods and Rockers battle at Margate. Mods wore sharp suits and rode decorated Vespers and Lambrettas. Rockers wore leather and rode motor bikes, 100mph no helmets. There was running battle between 400 plus youths and the Police, some brought in from other areas. Magistrates handed out fines, jail and detention Centre terms. Thanet has had a long history of unrest. The peasant's revolt of 1381 was a mostly Southern uprising, including Thanet. Margate as a port was a centre for pressgangs working to fill navy ships.

In the 1970's Margate fell on hard times as did the whole British Seaside as cheap flights to the sunshine became available. Thanet and Margate in particular was a centre of deprivation. No jobs and worse no prospect of jobs. Recently the town is beginning a revival. The catalyst was the decision to build a Regional off shoot of the Tate Gallery in Margate. It is called the Turner Contemporary after the great painter JWM Turner who spent holidays and painting in and around Margate as he thought that the light, north facing, was special as was his Landlady Mrs Booth. Dreamland has been revived with an injection of Millions of cash. The Gallery has brought in people to open restaurants and begin to renovate fine Georgian buildings and if we are to have COVID-19 staycations Margate may revive even further.