

Magical Margate

A self-guided walk around Margate in Kent



Follow the changing fortunes of a famous seaside resort
Discover why this Kent town became 'London's playground'
Explore miles of golden sands and try the seawater cure
Find out how Margate is being reinvented as a home for modern art

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**the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks**







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Cover image: Sunset over Margate Harbour © Laura Shawyer

Magical Margate

Discover the reinvention of the Great British Seaside

Noted for its healthy sea air and sunshine, Margate became the pre-eminent coastal resort for Londoners fleeing the capital to escape its infamous smog. This town on the North Kent coast became known as 'London's playground.'

On this walk you'll discover the origins of this traditional seaside resort and find out how it evolved from a small fishing village to become the home of one of Europe's most influential art galleries.



Margate Sands in the 1930s
© Science & Society Picture Library

Discover how the town's location (close to the capital in one direction and the Continent in another) and its natural resources (long sandy beaches and fair weather) helped to shape its fortunes.



Reflecting on Margate's past and future
© Adam Bowie, Flickr (Creative Commons License)

Explore the historic old town with its curious alleyways and cobbled streets. Discover the genteel resort of Cliftonville. See a lady made of shells and amble through the valley of a lost river. Walk in the footsteps of a Modernist poet and a Romantic painter.

The walk was created by Laura Sawyer who was born in Margate and has retained a strong interest in and affection for the town.

Route overview



Practical information

Location	Margate, Kent, South East England
Getting there	<p>Train - Regular services run from London Victoria and London St Pancras</p> <p>Car - Margate is accessed via the A28 which leads off the M2</p> <p>Bus - The area is well served by local buses including the Thanet Loop which runs between Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate</p> <p>Bicycle - National Cycle Route 15/ Viking Coastal Trail</p> <p>Cycle hire is available in Margate from: The Bike Shed, 63 Canterbury Road, CT9 5AS Ken's Bike Shop, 26 Eaton Road, CT9 1XA Viking Coastal Trail Cycle Hire, Minnis Bay Car Park, Birchington</p>
Start & finish point	Margate railway station, CT9 5AD
Distance	3 ½ miles
Level	Gentle - An easy route following the seaside promenade
Conditions	It can be breezy on the coast so you might need to wrap up. Take care along the seafront between Margate and Cliftonville as there are no lifebuoys.
Suitable for	Families – plenty to entertain families from the long golden sands to the Turner Contemporary. Lots of family-friendly cafés. Note: there are steps along sections of the route so it may not be suitable for wheelchairs / pushchairs.

Refreshments

Several cafés in the old town (Stop 8), the Harbour Arm (Stop 13) and at Turner Contemporary (Stop 12). Walpole Bay Hotel in Cliftonville (near Stop 17) offers lunches and cream teas.

Picnic spots on Margate Sands and at Cliftonville bandstand

Toilets

- Margate Railway Station (Stop 1 & 2)
- Nayland Rock promenade shelter (Stop 3)
- Marine Terrace near the Clock Tower (by Stop 5)
- Harbour Arm (Stop 13)
- The Oval Bandstand (near Stop 15)
- Baby changing facilities at College Walk Shopping Mall (near Stop 8)

Places to visit

Margate Museum is open May-Sept at weekends & Weds, 11am - 5pm. Closed Dec & Jan otherwise open weekends only 11am - 4pm. margatemuseum.wordpress.com

The Shell Grotto, Grotto Hill, CT9 2BU. A mysterious underground cave covered in 4 million shells. Open daily Apr - Oct, weekends Nov-Mar. www.shellgrotto.co.uk

The Powell-Cotton Museum at **Quex Park**, Park Lane Birchington, CT7 0BH. Historic house with museum, gardens & family-friendly activities. www.quexmuseum.org

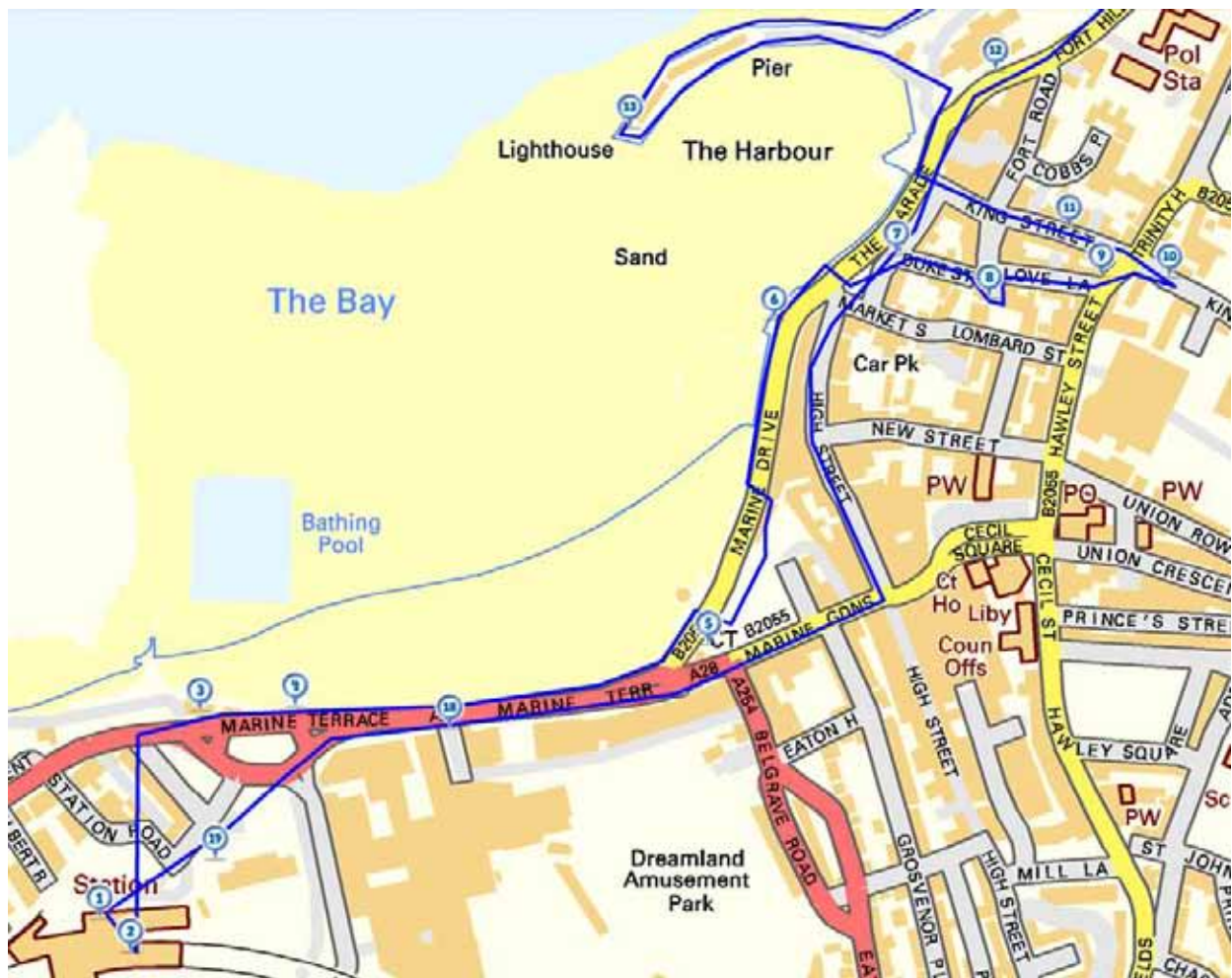
Tom Thumb Theatre, 2A Eastern Esplanade, CT9 2LB. One of the world's smallest theatres, music & comedy venues. www.tomthumbtheatre.co.uk

Turner Contemporary (Stop 12) is open Tue - Sun 8am -6pm. Free entry except special exhibitions. www.turnercontemporary.org

Tourist information

Thanet Visitor Information Service is at The Droit House (Stop 12), Stone Pier CT9 1JD www.visitthanet.co.uk/

Detail of the first and last sections of route

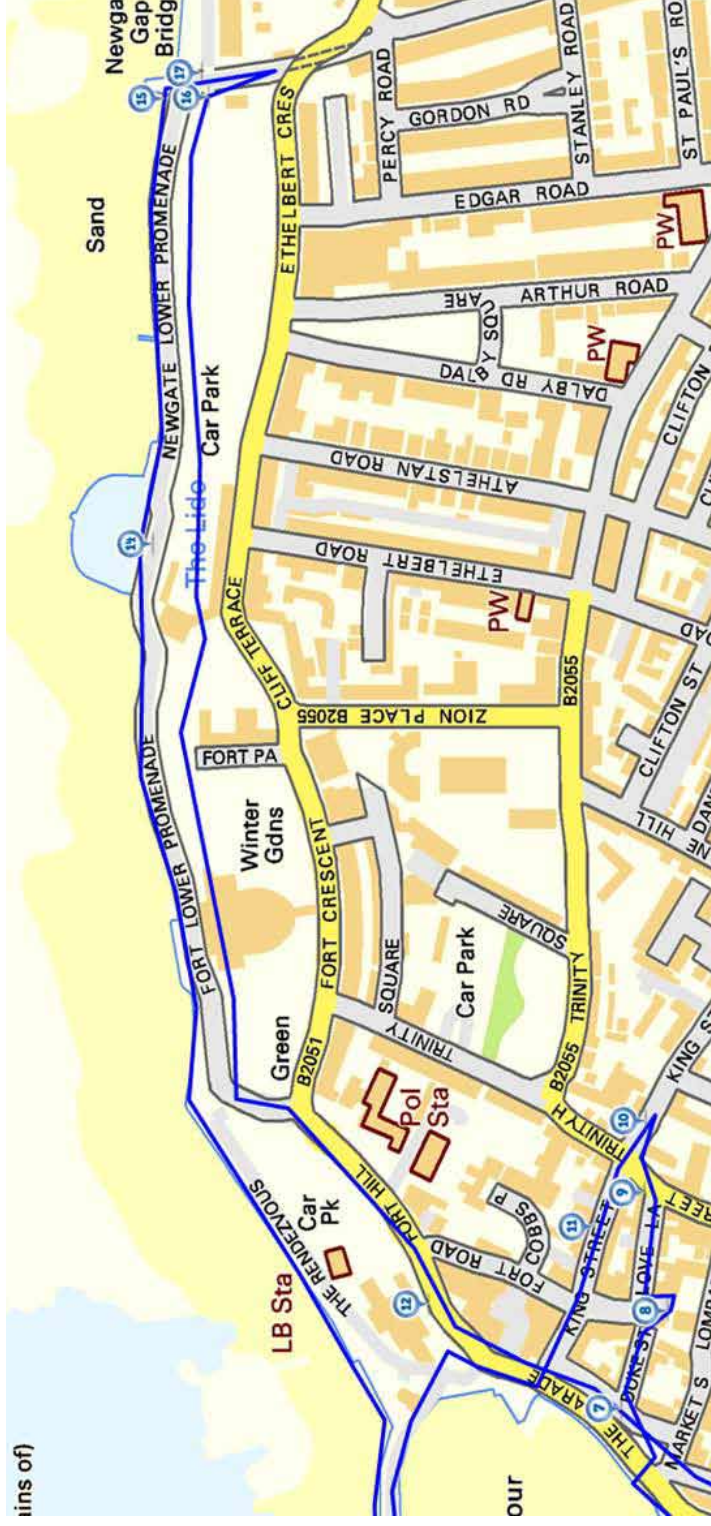


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Stopping points

1. Entrance to Margate Railway Station
2. Water Tower, Platform 1
3. Nayland Rock promenade shelter
4. Boardwalk seating, Margate Main Sands
5. Margate Clock Tower, Marine Gardens
6. Steps of flood scheme, Marine Drive
7. The Ruby Lounge, Duke Street
8. The old town, Market Square
9. Corner of Love Lane and Hawley Street
10. The Tudor House, King Street
11. 21 King Street
12. Turner Contemporary, The Rendezvous
13. The Shell Lady, end of the Harbour Arm
- ...
18. Dreamland site, Marine Terrace
19. Stone art-circle by The Promenade pub

Detail of the middle section of the route



Stopping points

13. The Shell Lady, end of the Harbour Arm
14. The Lido, Newgate Lower Promenade
15. Newgate Gap cutting, Lower Promenade
16. Newgate Gap Bridge, Cliftonville
17. Walpole Bay bathing pool

1. Down to Margate

Margate railway station

For the last 200 years, Margate in Kent has been known and loved as a typically British seaside town, even vying with Scarborough, Whitby and Brighton for the title of England's first seaside resort.

On this walk, we'll look at some of the geographical and historical reasons for this and discover how Margate exploited its natural resources and key geographical location to entice thousands of visitors.



Postcard of Margate (including the demolished Sun Deck) (1950s)
© Daily Herald Archive / National Media Museum / Science & Society Picture Library

This walk also considers the changing face of the British seaside resort and explores both how and why the fortunes of coastal towns like Margate have ebbed and flowed like the tide.

As well as looking to the past, we will also look to the future and suggest how Margate might adapt to change and future challenges. We'll consider Margate's recent regeneration as the new Turner Contemporary art gallery brings a welcome influx of creativity into the town.

We hope that by the end of the walk you will have had space to contemplate some of the challenges that face our seaside towns in the twenty-first century, and to consider how they can retain their unique character while staying open to change.

The walk is 3½ miles long. The route includes esplanades, promenades, coastal cliff-top paths, roads and a few steps. Please take care when crossing roads and watch out for cyclists, vehicles and watercraft. Also be aware of the weather, tides, the strength of the waves and - in some places - the lack of railings or lifebuoys.

We hope you enjoy the walk and return safely to Margate railway station renewed, stimulated and ready to support the Great British Seaside revival as it continues to gather momentum.

Directions 1

With your back to the station booking-hall, face the train tracks and turn left. Continue to the end of Platform 1 and look at the redbrick tower next to the bicycle racks.

2. An architectural gem

Water tower, Margate railway station

We begin here at Margate's Grade II listed railway station built in 1926. If you travelled here by train, you'll have stepped off onto a long curving platform which you'll notice is much longer than your train. The long platform was designed to accommodate steam trains which brought vast numbers of Victorian tourists from London to Margate to escape the smog of the city.

This redbrick building is a water tower dating from 1863. It was originally built to hold the gallons of water needed to power the steam trains. A peep through the window reveals the black water-pipes and the manufacturer's name, Glenfield.

If you look up, above the brickwork you'll see the silvery grey water tank. Notice also the wonderful round-headed windows and the Star of David in the two windows at either end. It's a lovely example of how Victorian engineers combined both practicality and beauty in their designs, even for functional buildings like this.



The classically-designed water tower
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

It's time to leave the station behind and head for Margate's main natural attraction – its golden sands. As you exit the station, stop to admire the booking hall on the way out. It's a grand, high-ceilinged, spacious building, a far cry from the cramped and crowded ticket halls of many stations today. Look up to admire its elliptically-vaulted ceiling, blue and white pendant lamps and ornate clock.

Margate railway station (along with nearby Ramsgate) was designed by the architect Edwin Maxwell Fry. Fry was employed as an architect by the Southern Railway and favoured neo-classical designs like this one. Later, he became a well-known modernist, much praised for buildings including Kensal House Estate in West London.

Directions 2

With the station entrance behind you, bear slightly right and walk past the (boarded up) Flag and Whistle pub and Railway café. Turn left to walk down Buenos Ayres past the guesthouses. Cross the busy road and head for the long white shelter.

3. On Margate Sands

View from The Nayland Rock promenade shelter



A panorama of Margate Sands
© Margate Civic Society

Find a seat here in this beautiful shelter, take in a deep breath of sea air, listen to the chant of the gulls and enjoy the view of Margate's golden sands. The poet T S Eliot wrote part of 'The Waste Land' here. You might even be sitting in his seat. You're certainly enjoying the same view that he took in as he wrote these lines:

On Margate Sands.
I can connect Nothing with nothing.
The broken finger-nails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect Nothing.

It's not a particularly optimistic extract. But Eliot was recuperating from a mental breakdown when he wrote these lines and came to Margate as part of a rest cure. The shelter is now a Grade II listed building.

Look to your left at the memorial of a lifeboat man looking out to sea. This (also Grade II listed) statue commemorates several men who lost their lives when the Margate Surf Boat capsized in December 1897. This statue serves as a constant reminder of the men and women who give their lives for those in peril at sea. The power of the waves is an ever-present natural phenomenon which Margate has long battled. We'll hear more about how the town continues to defend itself against the sea later on the walk.

Directions 3

Facing the sea, turn right and walk along the promenade for a short distance. Stop by a boardwalk seating area that juts out over the beach. From here you can enjoy views over Margate Main Sands.

4. The Sun Deck

Boardwalk seating overlooking Margate Main Sands

This seating area is a pleasant enough place to sit but there was once a much larger structure built out over the water here. Known as the Sun Deck, it opened in 1926, just four years after 'The Waste Land' was published.

The Sun Deck was a popular spot until it was dismantled in the 1980s. From here, sun-worshippers could take in the rays and bathe at low tide in the seawater pool. Families enjoyed the tearooms, the penny arcades, had their portraits taken and found shelter from the British weather.



Postcard showing the crowded Sun Deck (1950s)
© Suzannah Foad

Depending on whether the tide is in or out, you should be able to see the man-made bathing pool built in the sea. It's now been designated as a boating pool but when the Sun Deck used to be here it was a popular place to swim and splash - especially for families, who felt safe within the pool walls and protected from the waves and strong tide.



Sun worshippers can still enjoy Margate beach
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

In early 2013, the pool's old walls were refurbished as part of the new Margate Flood and Coastal Protection Scheme. The slipway, steps and ladders into the pool, signs and spillways were all replaced.

Whether this boating pool will once again become a bathing pool remains to be seen but it would be nice to provide a safe area to entice swimmers back into the sea again.

Directions 4

Facing the sea, turn right and walk along Marine Terrace (passing the entrance to the former Dreamland amusement park on your right) until you reach a crossing opposite the Clock Tower. Cross here and walk into Marine Gardens where you'll find a bench to sit on.

5. The sands of time

Margate Clock Tower, Marine Gardens

Margate's Clock Tower is a lovely piece of Victorian architecture, built to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. Since then it has kept time for those on the sands and in the town.

The sound of the bells peeling out the Westminster chimes adds to its charm and reminds us of Margate's close connection to London – both daytrippers escaping the city as well as the many ex-Londoners who've made the seaside town their home.

Look above the clock face and you'll see a red ball on a pole. At 12.57 GMT the ball is raised up the pole and at precisely 13.00 GMT it falls. This timeball allowed sailors out at sea to set their clocks accurately and confirm their longitude.

Sadly for the last 90 years the timeball hasn't functioned but in 2014 the Margate Civic Society successfully raised the money to restore it. On May 24th 2014, against a bright blue sky, the town's people watched the ball rise and fall again, a memorable moment in time and a symbol perhaps of more prosperous times.



A beacon for the town
© Laura Shawyer

Directions 5

Take the left hand path up through the gardens until you come to a cream-coloured terrace on the left. You might like to stop for a moment and look out to sea. It's been said that this spot was popular with local landladies who would watch for boats of tourists alighting at the harbour and entice them to stay at their boarding houses. Walk down the steps through the terrace to emerge onto Marine Drive. Cross the road and stop by the long, white concrete steps.

6. Battling the tide

Flood and coastal protection scheme, Marine Drive

This flight of white concrete steps leading down to the sea isn't just a convenient place to picnic or paddle; it is in fact part of a recent £6 million coastal scheme to protect the old town of Margate from flooding. In the event of a storm, these steps should reduce the risk of waves breaking over the sea wall and flooding the low-lying old town. The stepped design should dissipate the energy of the waves more slowly and efficiently than the old sea wall, which used to be battered by the sheer force of the waves hitting it head on.



Flood damaged Marine Drive (1953)
© Margate Civic Society

This area has been seriously affected by flooding over the years, including the Great Storm of 1953 that affected the east coast of Britain and killed over three hundred people. The harbour arm, the sea wall and many shops and houses here in Margate were severely damaged.

This new flood prevention scheme also includes strengthening the sea walls and the stone pier. It has been designed to reduce the threat of flooding from a one in 20 chance to one in 200.



The ornate sturgeon head lamps along the promenade
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

You'll notice as we stroll round Margate that design has not been sacrificed to engineering. This coastal defence doubles up as a new seating area. The wide steps are perfect for sunbathing. They give a nice gentle access into the sea and at night this area is lit up.

Also notice the ornate lamps along the railings, incorporating a dolphin/sturgeon design. These are a similar style to those along the Victoria Embankment in London giving us another nice link between Kent's coast and the capital.

Directions 6

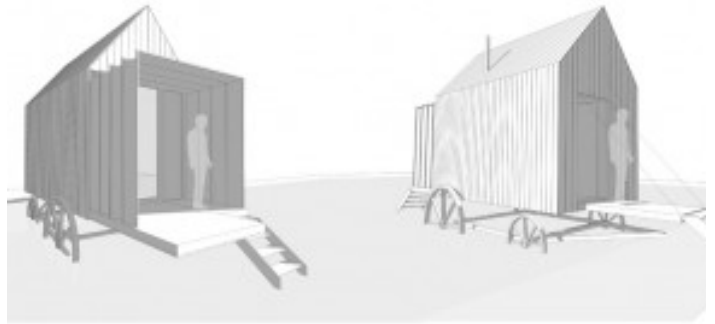
Continue along the seafront with the large silver/white Turner Contemporary art gallery in sight ahead. Turn right and take the crossing by a building called Marwell House. Now turn left and go into the cobbled plaza area to enter the old town. Go diagonally across the plaza to a side street called Duke Street and stop by a building called The Ruby Lounge.

7. Dunkers and dippers

The Ruby Lounge, Duke Street

This building, currently a pub called The Ruby Lounge, has two claims to fame. It has been both the home of the Grand Old Duke of York and the site of England's first-ever indoor sea-baths.

In the 1700s, bathing in the sea and drinking seawater became a fashionable cure for all sorts of diseases. In 1736 a channel was dug from this building down to the sea to allow salt water to enter and fill the basement baths of Thomas Barber's lodging house (now The Ruby Lounge). Barber's eager clients were offered hot and cold sea baths for their therapeutic properties.



Plans for the world's first sea bathing machine sauna!

© Haeckels

Over half a century later in 1791, The Royal Sea Bathing Hospital was opened in Margate for those seeking a cure for tuberculosis. Patients were exposed to the fresh sea air and the hospital had its own seawater reservoir. From the Georgian period onwards, visitors from London began flocking to resorts like Margate for the seawater cure and, increasingly, as a place to socialise.

It wasn't just the indoor bathing-houses that were popular; visitors also came to Margate's sands to bathe in the open sea. In fact, the name 'Mar Gate' means 'gateway to the sea' and the town first developed at a gap in the soft chalk cliff which led down to a natural salt-water pool.



Since then, Margate has built a reputation as a place for bathing in the sea - both for health and pleasure.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many local people found employment as 'dunkers' and 'dippers'. They earned their living by dipping and dunking bathers in and out of the sea.

The Bathing Parade; the building on the right was Pettman's bathing station

© Margate Civic Society

Bathing machines hired from the sands were pulled down into the water by horse. Bathers then took off all their clothes inside the bathing machine and were plunged into the sea.

A local man, Benjamin Beale, improved upon the machines' basic design, adding a canvas hood. This hood allowed the bather to become immersed in the sea in private. Later, when bathing costumes became common, the machines were used as changing rooms and allowed gentlemen and ladies to enter the sea unseen.

And it looks as though sea bathing is set to return in 2015. Haeckels (who create products from locally harvested seaweed) have taken the heritage of Margate's sea bathing machines and fused it with a state of the art sauna and treatment room. Just like the Georgians, we'll soon be able to experience the recuperative powers of seawater for ourselves.



Pettman's bathing machines, Margate
© Suzannah Foad



A Beale trading card advertising the company's patent bathing machines (1753)
© Margate Civic Society

Directions 7

Turn down Duke Street and into the heart of Margate old town. Walk towards the old Town Hall. When you reach it, turn right and then left under a walkway. You should now be near the entrance to the Margate Museum. Stop outside the Museum.

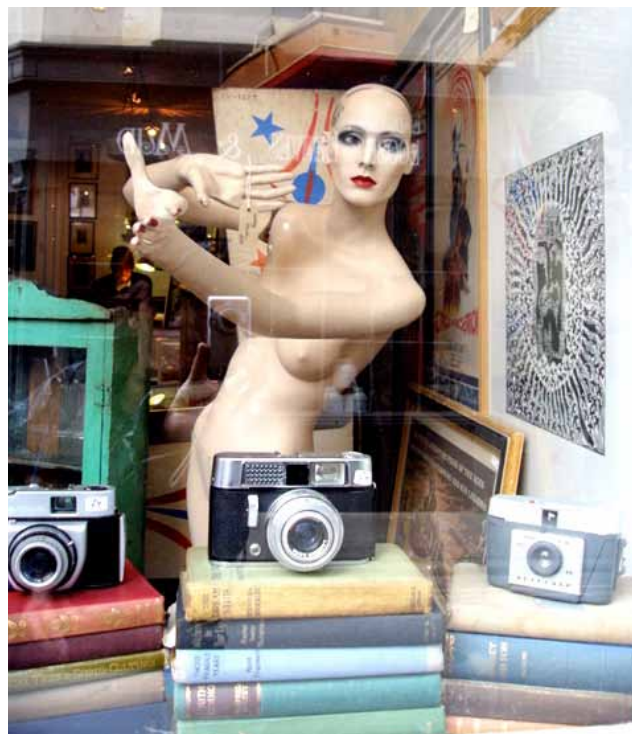
8. Bohemian quarter

The old town, Market Square

Many people are surprised to discover the old town of Margate. Award-winning restaurants, organic cafés, pubs serving Kentish beers and cider, art galleries, specialist tea shops, beauty parlours, and vintage furniture and clothes shops have sprung up here in the last few years.

Many of the once-empty buildings have been taken over as artist studios and workspaces. The old town is fast becoming recognised as being a creative quarter for art, music, fashion and even knitting!

Wander around for a while to experience the buzz of the old town. Remember to look up to really appreciate some of the beautiful architecture. You'll see graceful Georgian houses and traditional knapped-flint buildings side by side.



An eye-catching window display...
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Also see if you can spot the blue plaque above The Bull's Head pub celebrating the wedding reception of comedian Eric Morecambe and the pub landlord's daughter.



...and a fitting shop sign in the Old Town
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 8

Feel free to wander round and soak up the atmosphere of the old town before returning to the museum. With your back to the museum, turn left to walk to the end of Market Square and turn right into Love Lane. At the end of Love Lane stop at the block of yellow brick flats and find the blue plaque marking the site of Coleman's School.

9. A bright pupil

Corner of Love Lane and Hawley Street

Much of Margate's renaissance has been credited to Turner Contemporary, an art gallery which opened in 2011, and its influence on the flourishing arts scene. Yet art has always played an important role in the town's history.

Aged 11, the artist Joseph Mallord William Turner was sent by his parents to a school on this site in Love Lane. Even at this young and tender age he showed brilliance. Take a look at his painting of St John's Church he made when he was only 12. It's no small wonder that he went on to study at the Royal Academy and became one of our most famous artists.



Self-portrait of JMW Turner (c.1799)
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

Turner grew to love Margate and was drawn to the interaction of light and seawater on this north east facing stretch of coastline. He even went as far as saying: "the skies over Thanet are the loveliest in all Europe." On a sunny day in Margate you might agree!



Turner's painting of St John's Church, Margate
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

Directions 9

You are now standing at the crossroads of Hawley Street and King Street. Cross over the road and take note of the name of the local brewery 'Cobb's Ales' written on the window of the Ambrette Indian restaurant. Turn right into King Street to stop at the black-and-white timbered house in front of you.

10. A lost river

The Tudor House, King Street

This black-and-white timbered Tudor building set in its own gardens looks rather out of place here at this busy crossroads. During the seventeenth century, this house was the centre of a large estate which extended up the cliff top as far as the Winter Gardens (which we'll pass by later). A map of 1776 also shows a sizable farmyard surrounding the house including a malthouse for brewing beer (the brick building you can still see at the back).



The Tudor House - one of Margate's oldest buildings
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Although there is no evidence of it now, when the Tudor House was built, it stood on the banks of a stream which ran down through the Dane Valley and Dane Park, along King Street and entered the sea at Margate Harbour.



The site of Margate's lost river
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Though no watercourse is visible today, if you look carefully, there is some evidence to suggest that this is a dry river valley. Walk to the corner of the crossroads and notice how Hawley Street to the left and Trinity Square to the right rise up quite visibly, while King Street sits on lower ground.

If you look on old maps, King Street was originally called Bridge Street as there was once a crossing point here to help people over the water. Breweries and malthouses (such as the one behind the Tudor House and Cobb's brewery) are almost always located near to a water source, giving us further evidence that there was once a river or stream running past this spot.

Directions 10

Cross the road and walk ahead down King Street. Pass Cobb Court then stop outside Number 21 which features a blue plaque listing it as the home of the Cobb family.

11. The King of Margate

21 King Street

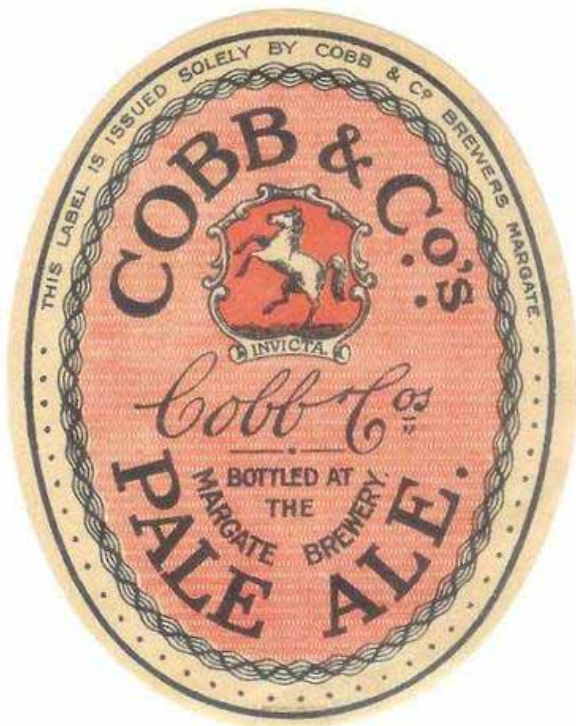
King Street is typical of the old town. It's a jumble of old and new Margate. Fishing-tackle shops and launderettes sit cheek by jowl with vintage fashions and furniture shops.

There is a mix of buildings too; some traditional knapped-flint cottages across the road from Georgian houses (recognisable by their protruding windows).

Francis Cobb, the self-titled 'King of Margate', opened a brewery here at Number 21 and it became the site of his growing empire.



Stevens ironworks at No. 36 King Street (1890)
© Margate Civic Society



One of many Cobb's ales brewed in Margate
© Suzannah Foad

The Cobbs were also investors in shipping and banking.

The building next door at Number 23 was the Cobb's own bank, the first purpose-built bank in the country. They even established their own currency and created their own banknotes.

As you continue down King Street you will cross Alkali Road. The name of this passage comes from the tradition of burning seaweed, one of the small industries that once thrived in the old town.

Seaweed was burnt to a powder called alkali, which we now call potash. The alkali was exported by boat from Margate harbour to countries like the Netherlands to provide glaze for their pottery industry.

Directions 11

Continue to the end of King Street. At the end, turn right and cross the road at the traffic lights. Stand near the slipway of Margate Harbour in front of the Turner Contemporary.

12. Art for art's sake

Turner Contemporary, The Rendezvous

Designed by the architect Sir David Chipperfield, this shining new £17 million building has changed the fortunes of Margate though it is not without controversy.

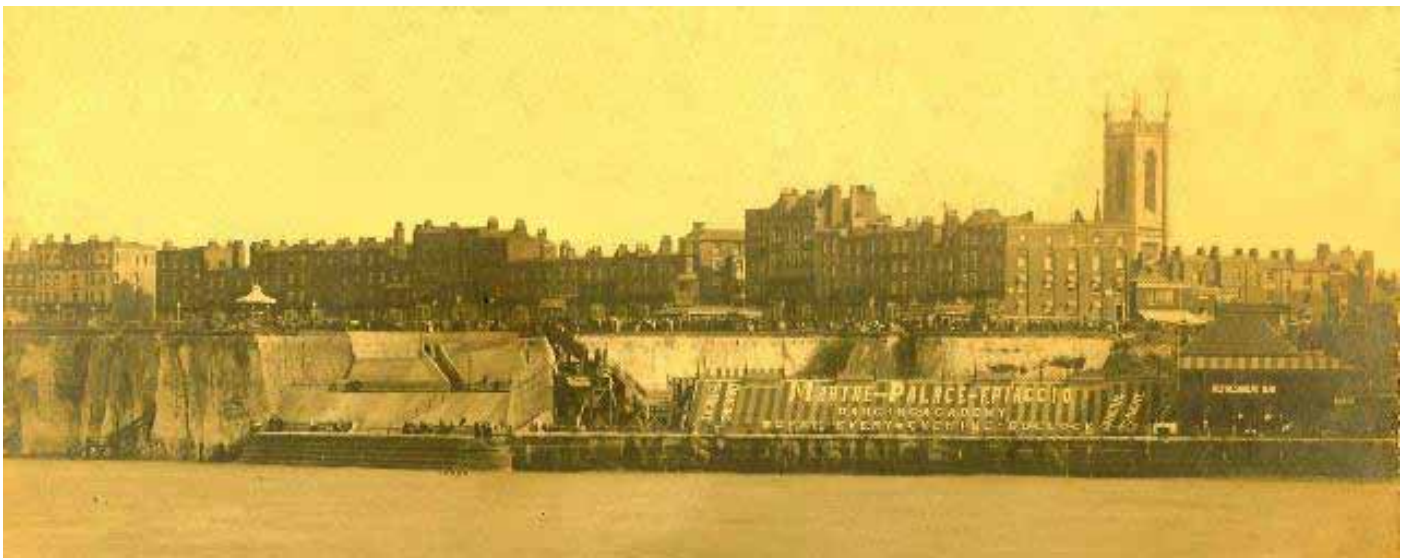
Since the gallery opened in April 2011, visitor numbers have shot up and the neighbouring old town has become a byword for trendy hipsterism.

Rather than a seaside town in decline, Margate is once again enjoying its place in the sun. But in many ways, Turner Contemporary is just the latest in a long line of public entertainments that have entertained visitors on this spot.



Turner Contemporary - alien, brutal and bleak?
© Andrew M Butler, Flickr (Creative Commons License)

In 1874, an aquarium stood on this stretch of land. Ten years later the Marine Palace dancing academy boasted drinking, dancing and refreshments nearby. Later a skating rink was built, a switchback railway and various sideshows. All this was destroyed, however, by the Great Storm of 1897. For 20 years the land was an eyesore until the Rendezvous Grand Circus was staged here. It then became a coach and car park before being chosen as the site for the new art gallery.



The Marine Palace dancing academy on the site where Turner Contemporary stands today
© Margate Civic Society

Just a short distance from here once stood a row of lodging houses including Mrs Booth's boarding house where Turner stayed between 1827 and 1838. He was drawn to Margate not only by his reputed love for Mrs Booth but also because of the unique views of the coast from her window. Turner is known as a 'painter of light' and it was this inspiring vista of dawn skies in the east and glorious sunsets in the west that he captured on canvas.

Margate is also closely linked to the Turner prize-winning artist, Tracey Emin. She was brought up in Margate, and like Turner before her, has been inspired by the town and the Kent coast in her artwork.

The cream-coloured building to the left of the gallery is known as the Droit House. Droits, or fees, were paid to the former Margate Pier and Harbour Company on goods shipped to or from Margate. The Droit House features one of Emin's neon artworks above the entrance; 'I never stopped loving you' is a poignant love letter to her home town.



X marks the spot of Mrs Booth's boarding house
© Margate Civic Society



Sunset reflections on the Turner Contemporary
© Laura Shawyer



Tracey Emin's neon love letter to Margate
© Katie Hunt, Flickr (Creative Commons License)

Directions 12

Facing Turner Contemporary, turn left and walk out along the Harbour Arm until you reach the statue of the Shell Lady right at the end.

13. She sells sea shells

The Shell Lady, end of the Harbour Arm

Lured by the long, golden coastline and the appeal of fresh air and seawater, first the Georgians then the Victorians came to Margate en masse. So began Margate's transformation from a small, rather poor fishing village to a major seaside resort.

Early visitors came to Margate by boat. Trading boats known as hoys transported cargoes of Thanet grain to the capital and brought sea bathers back to Margate. The journey took anywhere from ten to seventy-two hours.

Until the 1960s when it was sadly destroyed by storm, hoys, sailing ships and steamers docked at Margate's impressive jetty from where passengers could stroll into the town. The jetty was hugely important to Margate, though sadly nothing of it remains today.



The Shell Lady looks out to sea
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Along with the devastation of the jetty, coastal deposition means that the harbour has now silted up. As a result, Margate can no longer accommodate larger craft such as sailing ships. Today you'll probably see a few pleasure boats bobbing in the water but few visitors today enjoy the glamour of arriving by ship!

Here at the end of the harbour arm, the charming Shell Lady stares out at sea. This nine-foot high bronze sculpture represents Mrs Booth, Turner's landlady. They began their love affair in 1833 and lived together as Mr and Mrs Booth until his death in 1851. The statue is based on the seashell ornaments that used to be sold in seaside souvenir shops. It's rather an apt symbol for Margate – a place which manages to straddle high art and popular culture.

Directions 13

Go up the steps to the lighthouse. At the top of the steps walk along the top section of the wall past the lighthouse and head towards the steps which lead down to the lower walkway. At the bottom of the steps bear left and start to walk along the Fort Lower Promenade which passes the back of the Turner Contemporary, Lifeboat House, the Margate Yacht Club, and the Winter Gardens pavilion. This part of the walk gives you a chance to stretch your legs, enjoy the sea air and the invigorating tides. Stop when you reach the derelict Lido bathing pool.

14. Faded glory

The Lido, Newgate Lower Promenade

Built in the 1920s when sea bathing was in vogue, Margate Lido was once a hugely popular bathing complex. As well as its glorious outdoor marine pool, the Lido boasted a vast underground complex of bars, cafés, warm sea water baths and even a theatre. It's difficult to imagine now but this sad, derelict place was one of the liveliest spots along the coast.

Picture the scene here in the 1950s – excited children sliding down chutes into the pool, swimmers springing off diving boards, beauty pageants, ice creams and bingo from your deckchair.



Fun at the Lido before it was closed in the 1970s
© Suzannah Foad

In the 1970s the Lido was damaged by a storm. The outdoor and indoor pools were never mended and they fell into disrepair. Today this is a sad and desolate place yet it's just a short walk from the buzz of the Turner Contemporary. This is certainly a different side of Margate from the one we have enjoyed so far.

The Lido site cries out for redevelopment. Yet any development needs to be undertaken with great care to avoid disturbing a delicate marine environment. The coast here is particularly special. Thanet has the longest continuous stretch of coastal chalk in Britain and boasts some of the best chalk caves and reefs in the country.



Bars and beauty contests - the Lido was one of the liveliest spots on the Kent coast
© Suzannah Foad



Birds that have made their homes on Margate's chalk reefs - Turnstone, Golden Plover and Little Tern
© Alan D Wilson / Bjørn Christian Tørrissen / JJ Harrison, Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

This stretch of coastline is a significant habitat for the marine life associated with its chalk reefs and also as a feeding and nesting zone for wintering birds. You might spot Turnstones flickering in the air with their distinctive black-and-white colouring. They migrate here from Canada and feed on the chalk reefs for crabs, shellfish and shrimps. Golden Plover are found in important numbers and in summer the shingle provides an important breeding site for Little Terns.

The Lido complex has recently been sold and current plans include a new aquarium. Like the Turner Contemporary and restoration of the new Dreamland, a development like this could really help put Margate back on the map as a destination for daytrippers and holidaymakers.



The crumbling Lido Sands sign
© Laura Shawyer

Directions 14

Continue along the promenade with the sea on your left. Stop when you get to the first gap in the chalk cliff and a pathway through the cliff.

15. A cut above

Newgate Gap cutting, Lower Promenade

This cutting in the chalk cliff is called Newgate Gap. We'll soon be walking up to the cliff top through this gap but let's stop here first to find out what we're looking at.

The cutting is entirely man made and is actually one of 32 gaps or 'chines' around the Kent coast from Minnis Bay four miles west to Pegwell Bay four miles east.

These gaps were originally cut by local farmers who needed easy access down to the beach to gather seaweed, which they used as a natural manure on their fields. The gaps later became a favourite place for smugglers - a convenient passage for bringing their contraband brandy and tobacco into the town.

This now desolate spot was once another popular place for sea bathing. Here on the sands stood Pettman's bathing station with its large 'splashboard' deck and three sloping walkways leading down to horse-drawn bathing machines.

The bathing station offered a pleasant spot to dip in the sea, sunbathe and take refreshments - a far cry from today's empty (and sometimes bleak) stretch of coastline that doesn't even offer an ice cream van or a bucket-and-spade shop.



Donkey rides and deckchairs at Newgate Gap
© Margate Civic Society



Edwardian visitors enjoying the clifftop at Cliftonville
© Margate Civic Society

Directions 15

Now walk through the cutting in the cliff rock to follow the path uphill. Take a sharp right up a small flight of steps to emerge at the cliff top. As you walk up the cliff steps, look closely at the rock. This isn't natural but an artificial rockery known as Pulhamite. Walk past the blue shelter and turn right to stop on Newgate Gap Bridge.

16. Poets' rest

Newgate Gap Bridge, Cliftonville

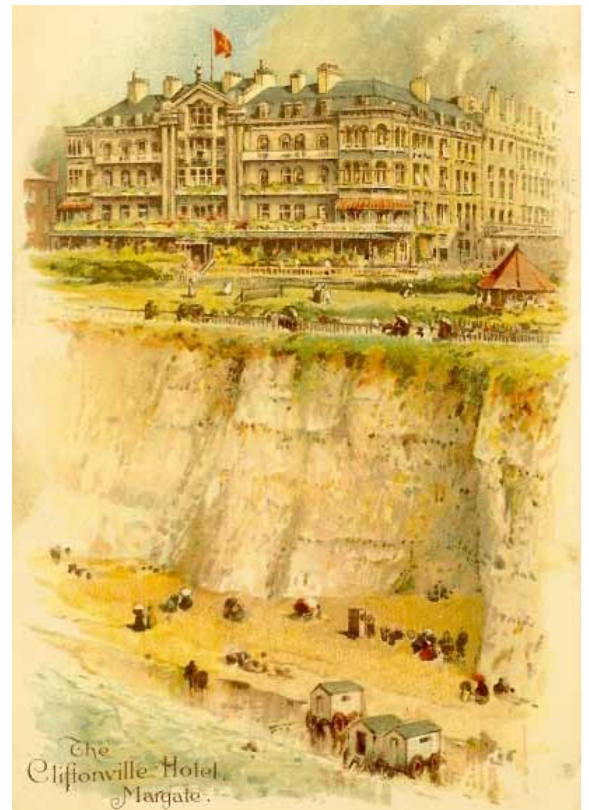
Today, Cliftonville is a quiet spot and yet in its heyday this was another hugely popular seaside resort.

Poet John Betjeman wrote about strolling along its promenade and the Albemarle Hotel here in Cliftonville was where T S Eliot convalesced when he wrote 'The Waste Land'.

The modern red-brick and glass building facing the sea is a set of purpose-built retirement flats. They replaced one of the grandest and most luxurious hotels on the coast.

The Queen's Highcliffe Hotel was built in 1885 for the hundreds of well-heeled holidaymakers that flocked to Cliftonville for their summer holidays.

The hotel boasted a small indoor swimming pool which later became a dolphinarium with performing dolphins and sea lions.



The Cliftonville Hotel
© Margate Civic Society



Cliftonville Hydro
© Margate Civic Society

Nearby, the Cliftonville Hydro Hotel offered visitors Russian and Turkish baths. Seventy years later, in a reflection of changing tastes, both hotels were bought by Butlins.

When British holidaymakers began flocking abroad in the 1960s and 70s, lured by cheap flights and guaranteed sunshine, seaside towns like Margate and Cliftonville suffered badly. Most of the grand hotels are now gone with the exception of the splendid Walpole Bay Hotel and museum just a short walk from here

Directions 16

Look out to sea and to your right to make out the red and white poles marking out the 1930s bathing pool.

17. Nature's tonic

Walpole Bay bathing pool, Newgate Gap Bridge

The level shores and miles of firm golden sand, not to mention its easy access from the capital, made Margate and Cliftonville the Number One destination for Londoners escaping the smog of the capital to enjoy sea air and salt-water bathing.

Today though the 1930s Walpole Bay bathing pool is now the only place along the coast where swimmers can still enjoy bathing in a designated open-air marine pool.



Walpole Bay bathing pool
Caroline Millar © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Old photos of the pool in its heyday show hundreds of holidaymakers reclining in deckchairs or splashing in the pool, while a small pier advertises 'Open Sea Bathing – Nature's Tonic' and offers soda fountains, cakes and pastries. Posters advertise tea dances and a Kodak stall for souvenir photos.

Perhaps part of the reason why these sands and the marine pool are not enjoyed so much today is because they are difficult to access. There used to be various stairways down to the beach (most now out of use) and a lovely Art Deco cliff lift to transport swimmers down from the cliff top, but it's now out of order.

Directions 17

Walk back towards Margate, keeping the sea on your right. Stay on the Upper Promenade. Pass a children's playground and crazy golf, head towards the orange tower of the Lido. Go through the Lido car park and complex then up steps through an orange tiled archway. Emerge at a triangular green with a parade of houses in front of you. Continue along the seafront past the rooftops of the Winter Gardens. Pass the Turner Contemporary then cross over the road. Go through the cobbled area in the Old Town called The Parade, heading towards the tall, curved yellow building ahead.

Go up Margate High Street (left of the tall yellow building) past the row of single storey shops which used to be changing rooms for sea bathers. Continue to the crossroads of Queen Street and Marine Gardens. Turn right down Marine Gardens with the clock tower ahead. Pass the clock tower and the Flamingo amusements. Stop outside the tall brick building with a sign that reads 'Dreamland'.

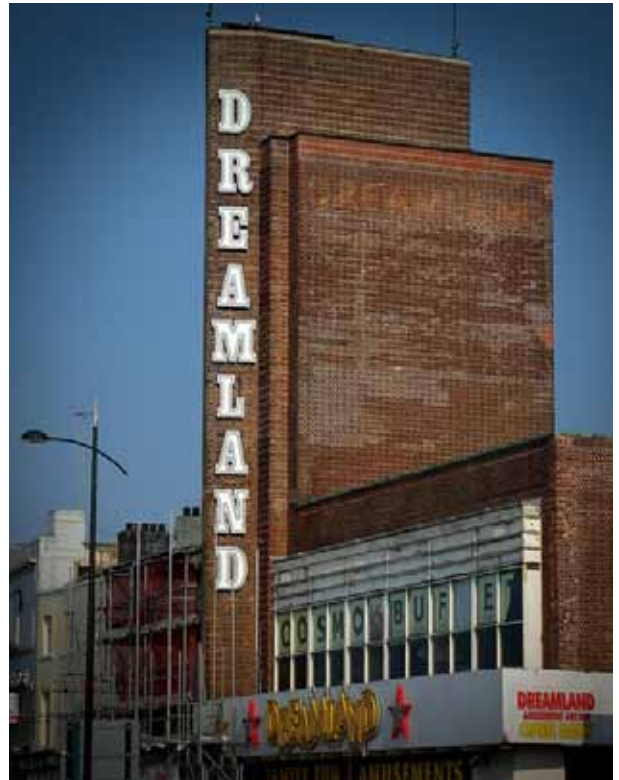
18. Past and future dreams

Dreamland site, Marine Terrace

This red-brick Art Deco style building with the iconic 'Dreamland' lettering running vertically down its fin might not look like much today. However, it could hold the key to Margate's future. This is part of the Dreamland amusement park, a place with a long and chequered history and a hopeful future.

The site chosen for the amusement park was once salt marsh prone to flooding at high tide. A seawall and causeway were built here in 1809 to protect the area from flooding, then around 1860 a railway terminus was built for the London, Chatham and Dover Railway Company.

This terminus was never used though and in 1870 a creative entrepreneur called 'Lord' George Sanger saw a business opportunity for this low-lying land behind the causeway and sea wall. He wanted to develop the land as a pleasure garden and a home for his travelling circus. It became known as the 'Hall-by-the-Sea'.



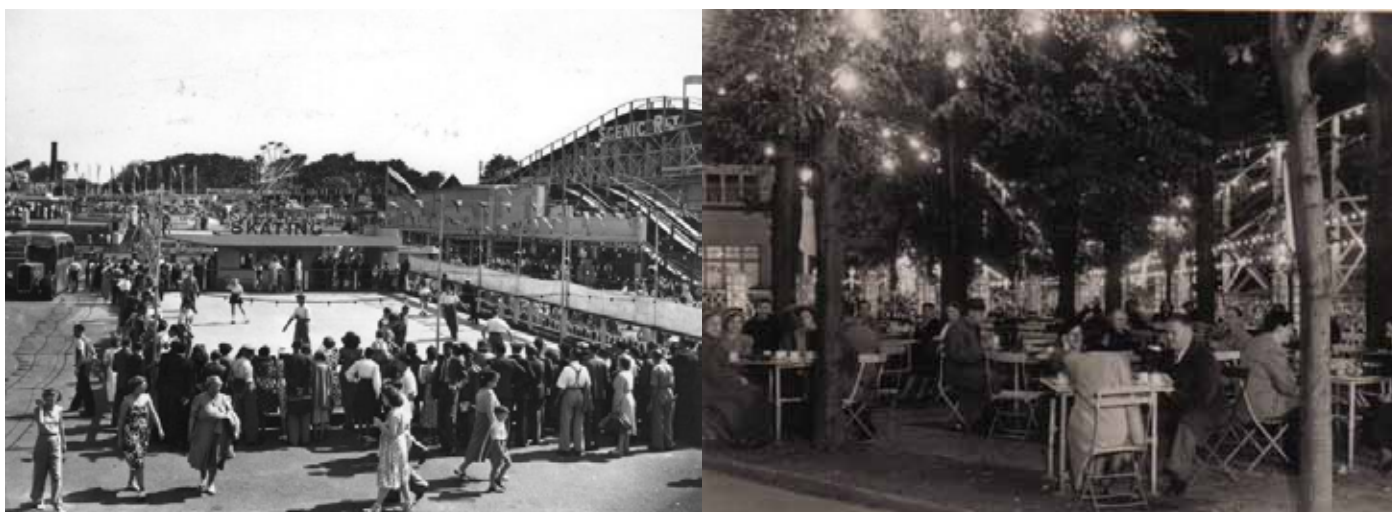
The iconic (Grade II listed) Dreamland cinema
© Max Montagut, Flickr (Creative Commons License)



Aerial view of Dreamland in its heyday
© Max Montagut, Flickr (Creative Commons License)

After Sanger's death the site was purchased by a Mr Iles who, inspired by New York's Coney Island amusement park called Dreamland, created an amusement park here with the same name.

Perhaps most famous for its scenic railway (still the UK's oldest roller-coaster), the park also boasted a ballroom and various attractions including 'the girl in the bottle' a world-famous high diver (who dived from a high crane into a swimming pool) and 'Midget Town'!



Dreams of the past: Dreamland's skating rink (left) and visitors enjoying the cafe at night (right)
© Suzannah Foad

In 1991, ownership of the site changed hands again and Bembom Brothers created a white-knuckle-ride theme park. Since 2003, the park has been closed except for temporary fairs but now this largely derelict site has been earmarked for development as a new heritage amusement park. The proposal for 'vintage' rides includes restoring the classic wooden roller coaster and bringing back classic rides from the 1890s to the 1960s that have been saved from other theme parks.



Dreamland's vintage rollercoaster before it was devastated by fire
© Chris Mills, Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

Directions 18

Continue along Marine Terrace. Near the end of the road by Arlington House tower block, notice that the buildings are now empty to make way for a proposed new supermarket. However, there has been a lot of opposition and so the fate of this development was still uncertain when we created this walk. Just past the boarded-up retail establishments, stop at the stone art-circle just before the station.

19. From Waste Land to Dreamland

Stone art-circle, in front of The Promenade pub



The changing face of Margate resort - 1900s luxury, 1960s family fun and 1990s theme park thrills
© Margate Civic Society / National Railway Museum / Science & Society Picture Library

We hope you have enjoyed your walk around Margate and Cliftonville. Our route has taken us from Margate's grand railway station, designed to accommodate crowds of day-trippers and holidaymakers, to the site of a new amusement park determined to respect the town's heritage.

We've heard about the storms which destroyed many of Margate's coastal structures and seen the brand new flood defences. We've explored the valley of a lost river without getting our feet wet, witnessed an old town made new and walked in the footsteps of a Modernist poet and a Romantic painter.

From a gap in the cliffs where people saw an opportunity to bathe to a smart Georgian resort offering the seawater cure; from the genteel seaside town bringing Victorians by train to the traditional bucket-and-spade holiday of the 1950s, Margate has been adept at reinvention.

As well as finding clues to Margate's past, this walk has been about looking to the future. Turner Contemporary has brought new hope to the town, there are ambitions to redevelop the Lido and plans for Dreamland amusement park are well under way.

Many seaside resorts across Britain face the same dilemma of how to adapt from the traditional attractions of 'kiss me quick' novelties, amusement arcades and mini golf, into to a twenty-first century destination.

Margate with its flourishing art scene, retro shops, upmarket cocktail bars and plans to bring back indoor sea-bathing might just have found the right formula.



Margate Harbour (c.1897)
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

Directions 19

You are now a short distance from the railway station where we began the walk. You may like to return to the beach, explore the old town or visit some of the local attractions, such as Margate Museum, the Shell Grotto or Turner Contemporary.

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

- **Laura Shawyer** for creating the walk, providing photographs and the audio commentary
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