

Margate Civic Society

(Founded 1968)
Registered Charity No. 257884

Autumn 2005
Newsletter
Issue No. 340

"The love of our town leads us"

President: Mr Ralph Handscomb

Chairman: Mr Steve Villette

Welcome to your new-look newsletter. Your Committee hopes that the membership will both approve the new style and welcome the change in presentation of the newsletter. The old style had served the membership well for nearly 40 years but a change in editorship brings with it a change in style allied with a change in the frequency of the production of newsletters. In future, the newsletter will be issued four times a year: in spring, summer, autumn and winter – rather than ten times a year. Sincere thanks are expressed to my predecessor, Mrs Phil Johnson MBE, for having taken on the newsletter some three years ago and for ensuring that newsletters were produced on time throughout that period. During these last summer months, Phil very kindly offered to take on the role of Treasurer when she learnt of Jack Pilcher's intention not to stand for re-election to the position of Membership Secretary. Phil's offer was, however, on the basis that someone else took on the role of Newsletter Editor. Despite being elected to the Committee only last year, I was persuaded by the Committee to offer my services by taking over from Phil which, after a short period of reflection, I gladly accepted. So here I am. Please let me have any comments you might have on the new-look newsletter. I would also welcome any contributions – including letters – for future issues.

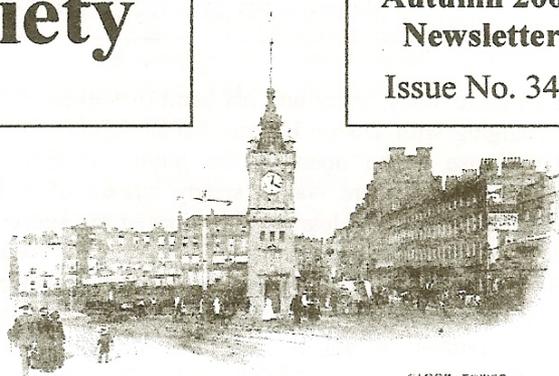
The Society now owns a digital camera (thanks to a grant from Thanet District Council) and it is intended that future issues of the newsletter will contain recent photographs to accompany contributions from members. It is also intended to reproduce images of our town (and surrounding area) from the past – such as the photograph of the Clock Tower above. The newsletter, however, will be produced using my own PC. As I am still on a 'steep learning curve' as regards both my PC and the Society's digital camera, I would ask members to be a little forgiving whilst I continue my attempt to ascend the upper reaches of that learning curve. □

James Brazier
Newsletter Editor

Welcome to new members

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members who have recently joined the Society:

Mrs M. Johnston, Mr & Mrs D. E. Taylor, Mr & Mrs R. Twine and to Mr V. Lewis who has rejoined us.

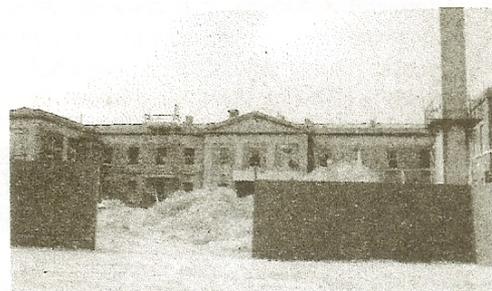


CLOCK TOWER

*Queen Victoria Golden Jubilee (1887) Clock Tower
– from postcard circa 1900*

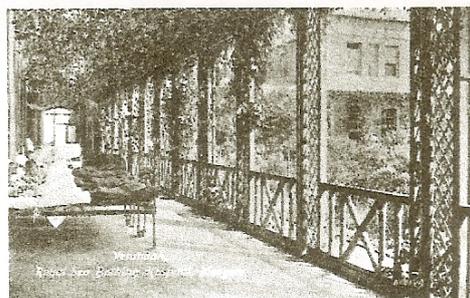
Royal Sea Bathing Hospital, Westbrook

The former Royal Sea Bathing Hospital building remains one of the town's most important buildings. Today, the site is being redeveloped and its completion is awaited with much interest. The former hospital is a Grade II listed building as indeed are also both the former hospital mortuary and chapel buildings. The magnificent bronze statue in the grounds of the former hospital of Sir Erasmus Wilson sculpted by Sir Thomas Brock and erected in the late 1880s is also a Grade II listed building.



Works proceeding at the East Wing of the former Royal Sea Bathing Hospital. This recent photograph was taken from Westbrook Road

It is therefore very appropriate that this issue of the newsletter should contain an article by Derek Austen in which he recounts many happy days spent there working as an orthopaedic nurse from 1948 to 1980. □



Copy of a postcard (c.1920) showing child patients on one of the hospital's verandahs

Report on Heritage Day (Saturday, 10th September 2005)

Thanks go to Tony Snow and his band of willing helpers for arranging with Thanet District Council (TDC) for the Tudor House to be open to the public on Saturday, 10th September. There was a steady stream of visitors during the day which clearly demonstrated the success in opening to the public this beautifully restored 16th century house which is the oldest house in Margate. Visitors to the Tudor House were entertained by Colin Bridge – another member of our Society – leading the Thanet Concert Clarinets. In addition, Mick Twyman of the Margate Historical Society very kindly attended the Tudor House during the morning and gave visitors the benefit of his far-reaching research into the history of the building and pointing out many of its interesting features.

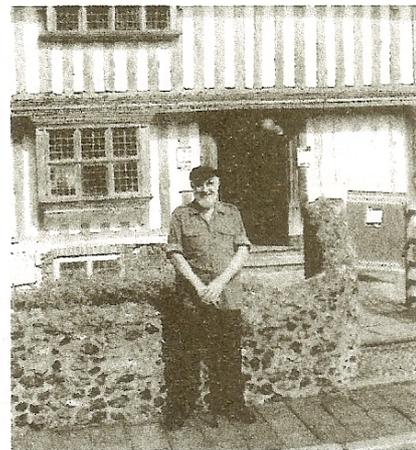
Let us hope that one day TDC will be able to make arrangements for this Grade II* listed building to be open to visitors on a more frequent basis.

Thanks must also go to Tony Snow for guiding parties around old Margate on Heritage Day. We are very fortunate indeed that Tony should be so generous with the amount of time that he and his wife Pat give to the work of our Society.

There were 124 visitors to the Tudor House that day and another 22 joined Tony in his Heritage Day guided walk. It was most rewarding to see so many interested and interesting people on that day. Clearly, the whole day was a most worthwhile effort by the Civic Society. □



Colin Bridge and the Thanet Concert Clarinets enjoying a short break inside the Tudor House



Mick Twyman of the Margate Historical Society



Tony Snow at the Tudor House



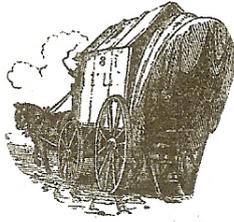
Tony Snow leading a guided tour in the harbour area (note the Droit House in the background)



The bronze plaque affixed to the front of the Tudor House giving information on its restoration over 50 years ago ⇒



**Margate Museum
Corner**
(another contribution from
Bob and Terry,
'The Unlikely Lads')



Sunbeam at the Seaside

As you enter the Seaside Room in Margate Museum and turn right, you will see a scene which includes a life-sized model of a donkey. This is one of the original seven donkeys used in Thanet from the late 1940s to around 1960. They were used as 'props' by photographers employed by Sunbeam Photo Ltd. The donkeys proved very popular especially when trying to persuade young children to have their picture taken. Many of these photographs survive although Terry has to admit that the ones of him are kept well hidden.



*Local lads photographed at Westbrook Bay
by Sunbeam Photos c. 1950*

The Sunbeam Photo Company was founded by John Milton Worsell in 1919 with the help of Frederick Lewis Pettman who was to become Mayor in 1932-34 and whose name is still prominent in the town as removal-contractors and auctioneers. With the then ever-increasing popularity of the seaside holiday, holiday-makers jumped at the chance of having a photograph taken of themselves by the sea. At first, Sunbeam Photos started at Margate but soon they expanded their activities to include bays at both Ramsgate and Broadstairs. Later on and at the height of the summer season, they employed 300 staff and took 35,000 photographs a day. Indeed, they were considered to be the largest photographic firm in England. On a typical summer's day, the negatives/rolls of used film would be collected every

hour and taken to their works at the rear of Sweyn Road, Cliftonville for development and printing ready for the printed photographs to be collected the next day from the Sunbeam kiosk at whichever bay the photograph was taken.

The company began by using heavy plate-glass negatives but found that they were expensive and cumbersome so John Worsell sought a cheaper and quicker alternative. The result was a card negative roll just over 33 feet long and 5½ inches wide which allowed 100 postcard-size exposures to be made without reloading the camera.

As the season for this type of trade lasted only from June to September, the company also produced studio portraits as well as photographs of animals. The company also supplied photographs to local newspapers in the Thanet area and most of the photographs used in the town holiday-guides from the 1920s right through to the 1960s were taken by Sunbeam Photos. In the 1940s, the American National Geographic Magazine published a Sunbeam Photos picture of Foreness Bay (although it, unfortunately, wrongly captioned it as being of Margate Bay).

Sunbeam Photos ceased trading in 1976 when they sold out to United Photographic Laboratories. □



*A Westgate lad photographed with Sunbeam Photos' panda
at West Bay c 1950 (note the Sunbeam Photos' kiosk in the
background)*

(Margate Museum's open hours during the winter period are 10am to 4.30pm each day Monday to Friday. Please do call in to the Museum to see the interesting range of exhibits on display which capture much of Margate's past. You will not be disappointed.)

Some reminiscences of the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital from 1948 to 1980

The Royal Sea Bathing Hospital (RSBH) was established in 1791 for patients suffering from surgical tuberculosis – that is, tuberculosis of the bones, joints or kidneys. Apparently, the decision was taken to found a hospital for the ‘scrofulous poor of London’ in Margate because of the bracing air. It was a little too bracing for those patients suffering from lung diseases, but offered ideal conditions for those with surgical TB.

Before the verandas were glassed in, the wards had shutters which could be closed against the elements. However, unless it was bitterly cold, they were left up, and, apart from Christmas Day, patients only came into the wards if they became severely ill, which wasn’t a common occurrence. Sometimes there was even snow on the beds! However, patients had mackintosh sheets over them, as well as hot-water bottles, which were replenished as soon as they got cold. Some patients even wore gloves! In the summertime, though, gloves and hot-water bottles were exchanged happily for sun-hats, as patients were wheeled outside and gradually acclimatised to the heat, uncovering a little more as each day went by.

Patients with TB spines were treated on plaster beds designed by the late Fred Christian of the Appliance Department at the RSHB. The turning plaster was tied together and turned by one person. Those suffering with glands of the neck wore cervical braces, while hips were nursed on an abduction frame. The longest-staying patient I can remember was a man with TB spine. He spent about four-and-a-half years at the RSHB and made a complete recovery.

At Christmastide, all the wards were decorated with a different theme each year with the children’s wards always decked out spectacularly on themes such as *The Water Babies*. On Christmas Eve, carols were sung round the wards beginning with the children’s wards. Nurses wore their cloaks inside out, showing the red lining, and carried lanterns with everyone ending up in the canteen for mince-pies and coffee.

On Christmas morning, after breakfast, all the beds were brought into the wards and, later, there was a carol service in the RSBH chapel with the front half of the chapel left empty to allow for beds, leaving the pews at the back for the ‘walkers’. There was always a full congregation including staff, patients and their relatives. After the service, it was back to the wards for coffee and a visit from Father Christmas. (Now, who could that have been? No surprises there – yes, it was me!) Everyone received a present and there was a kiss for each of the ladies and a handshake for each of

the men.

Christmas dinner was the full fare – turkey and all the trimmings. The surgeons used to carve the turkey (although towards the end of my time at the RSBH, I finished up carving it once!). One Christmas, after dinner, Derek Blackburn, Alan Arnold and I rode through K.G.I and K.G.II on a motorbike, with Derek up front, Alan riding pillion and me standing on the back. It was quite a shock for the men to see a motorcycle in the ward with three up!

Another year, I was dressed as Father Christmas and was hiding from the children, before distributing the presents, when an RAF helicopter landed on the green outside the children’s ward. Another Father Christmas got out, handed some presents to the Sister, got back on board the helicopter and took off. Once they were out of sight, I came out of hiding to distribute the presents. Just when I thought any confusion had been safely averted, one of the children said: “You’re not the same Father Christmas. He was wearing black boots and you are wearing white ones.” They never miss a trick!

On Christmas Day evening, the festivities continued with bingo and accordion-bands. In one of the male wards, the snooker-table was decorated and laid up with various goodies – nuts, fruit and sweets. It was always a very special time much enjoyed by staff and patients alike.

It wasn’t only at Christmas that there was fun to be had, however, with events and activities planned through the year. One Bonfire Night was particularly memorable, with fireworks on the lawn. One rocket went up and came straight back down into the stockpile of fireworks at the opposite end of the green. Fortunately, no one was hurt but we had an amazing display for a full five minutes!

During the summer months, there were all kinds of activities. A circus brought clowns and elephants on to the green one year, giving a fabulous show and keeping everyone (particularly the children) entertained for hours. We were also visited by the Dagenham Girl Pipers, with the Highland Dancers dancing on the green. Staff football-matches were always good fun and well attended, while regular hospital fêtes put on numerous activities, with horse-and-buggy riding for the children and an array of stalls.

The RSBH boasted two tennis courts, where I and others enjoyed many a game over the years. The Wallis Memorial Hall was eventually built on one of

them and was used for staff dances as well as various meetings. The wine club, which still flourishes in All Saints Church Hall, originated there, as did the NHS Fellowship which is also still going strong, now meeting at The Portland Centre at St Peter's on the first Wednesday of each month. (I had to get that in as I'm Chairman of the Fellowship!)

The women's wards and the men's wards (strictly segregated of course) were in an 'L' shape. The patients were able to 'talk' to one another using sign language, drawing the letters in the air. A number of activities offered opportunities for the more mischievous patients to bend the rules of segregation. Picture-shows in the Wallis Memorial Hall offered one such opportunity, as patients vied (and frequently succeeded) in getting their beds beside those of the opposite sex. Sunday services in the chapel were always well attended and, once again, men and women somehow managed to end up with their beds side by side. One could never be sure just how popular the service was for itself and how many attended to meet up with other patients or simply to take a break from the wards.

There were also more serious activities available, with classes on the wards for the adult patients, including typewriting and book-keeping. They also made trays from cane, as well as numerous baskets, working with bowls of water on their lockers to soak the cane and work-sheets on the beds to keep them clean. There was cane everywhere but they seemed to enjoy the work. The children, meantime, attended school in a separate building, where we had two full-time teachers. All school-aged children were pushed to their classes in their beds by the porters, with lunches served in the school by the nursing staff.

There was always something going on at the RSBH for children and adults alike. When the Americans were based at Manston aerodrome, they used to do a lot of landings and take-offs from the sea in their amphibious flying-boats which the men enjoyed immensely. For their part, the women used to look out for the air-sea rescue helicopter which would fly by slowly with the crew waving to them from above. And everyone enjoyed wedding visits, when nurses who were marrying locally would visit the wards in full wedding dress, accompanied by their new husbands.

The RSBH was a very happy place to work. I should know – I worked there for thirty-two years, starting as a nursing orderly in 1948 and ending up as a clinical instructor in orthopaedics.

Derek Austen ONC, RGN



Daphne Rowley very kindly supplied the above photograph to accompany Derek's article on the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital. Daphne took the photograph at the hospital's bi-centenary celebrations in 1991 attended by the Countess Mountbatten. Two years later, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth visited the hospital. Sadly, the hospital was to close less than three years after the Queen's visit. Daphne's photograph also shows the fine life-sized bronze statue of Sir Erasmus Wilson which was sculpted by Sir Thomas Brock. Approaching ten years after its closure, work is now in progress in re-developing this former hospital which played such a major part in the history of our town. Let us hope that the redevelopment will bring this important building back to life and once again contribute to both the local economy and the well being of the town. □

Do you have any reminiscences of the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital – or, indeed, any memories of life in Margate in yesteryear – which you would like to share with other readers? If so, please contact the Newsletter Editor whose address is shown on the back page.

Come on, don't be shy.

Annual General Meeting

The 2005 Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday, 6th October at The Walpole Bay Hotel. After the formal business of the meeting, members were entertained to an evening of music from the Thanet Concert Clarinets and to a selection of readings of local interest read by our new Secretary, Tony Snow. Details of the new Committee are set out on the back page of this newsletter.



Members enjoying a relaxing recital in congenial surroundings at The Walpole Bay Hotel, Cliftonville

Our Chairman, Steve Villette, writes: At the AGM, the Friends of Dane Park announced the good news that TDC had withdrawn their planning application to build homes on the corner of Dane Park. The Council claim that they are entitled to sell the land because when the original lease was enlarged in 1968, the previous conditions and covenants on the land ceased to apply. Copies of the lease were on display at our meeting, including the "Memorandum" dated 1968, which clearly states that "by the provisions of Section 153 of the Law of Property Act 1925, the 'fee simple' is subject to the same incidences of covenants as to user and enjoyment as herein contained".

Message from our President

Our President, Ralph Handscomb, writes:

Have you been to the Margate Museum lately? Bob Bradley (*its Curator*) has put together an extremely good exhibition of wartime memorabilia. I would like to suggest that you go to see this and, I can assure you, you will not regret the time spent. I have taken all my visitors to see it and they have all been surprised at the variety of posters, pamphlets and wartime memorabilia on show. I have also taken my guests to many of the new cafés (*in the Old Town area*) for a coffee. They are all worth while visiting, and to the Grotto, the Manston Spitfire Museum and to Quex Park. There really is an abundance of attractions in Thanet. Returning to the Margate Museum, there is a rumour that Thanet District Council are thinking of closing it. We must not let this happen. Please go there and prove to the Council that we are interested in what goes on in the town. □

Margate's Surfboat Disaster Memorials are now Listed Buildings

The town's two imposing memorials to the nine brave men who lost their lives in the Margate surfboat disaster have recently both been granted Grade II listed building status by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.



The magnificent life-size bronze figure as the town's memorial to the nine men who lost their lives in the surfboat disaster of 1897. The sculptor of this memorial was Frederick Callcott.



The imposing white marble memorial at the grave of the nine surfboatmen in Margate Cemetery. This photograph was taken in August this year when volunteers from the Margate Cemetery Trust were doing a good job of cutting back the surrounding hedge.

It is perhaps surprising that neither of these two structures was previously listed as being a building of historic or architectural importance. □

What's on

Margate Civic Society (talks all start at 7.30pm at The Walpole Bay Hotel):

- Thursday, 3rd November, 2005 "Grave Days: Grave Memories" an illustrated talk by James Brazier
Thursday, 8th December, 2005 "Gardens Great and Small" by Lt-Col Dick Bolton
Thursday, 2nd February 2006 "The Thanet Coast Project" by Alistair Bruce

Other organisations:

Turner Contemporary (talks all start at 6.00pm at the Margate Media Centre, King Street). These talks, which are open to everyone and admission is free, are recommended. Places are limited, so please book early (Tel: 280261) to avoid disappointment.

- 8th November 2005 "War and the Sea" by Richard Slocombe, Curator, Documentation, Imperial War Museum
6th December 2005 "Lost at Sea" by Dr Andrea Phillips, Assistant Director, MA in Creative Curating, Goldsmith's College
17th January 2006 "British Surrealism" by Andrew Causey, Professor of Modern Art History, University of Manchester
28th February 2006 "Coast Projects Commissioned by Firstsite" by Lyndall Phelps, Project Manager, Commissions East

Isle of Thanet Historical Society (talks all start at 7.30pm at the Roman Catholic Church Hall, Minnis Road, Birchington):

- 1st November 2005 "The Last Revolution – The Effects of Railways in Kent" by Dr Frank W. G. Andrews"
19th December 2005 "Poetry & Prose – Some Favourite Readings" by Peggy Man and Bernie Coverdale
16th January 2006 "Faversham's four 'B's – Brewing, Brickmaking, Barges and the Big Bang (Gunpowder)" by Margaret Burns
20th February 2006 "The Victoria Cross and its many anomalies" by Lt-Col Mike Martin

Kent Family History Society [Thanet Branch](talks all start at 8.00pm at Birchington Village Centre):

- 18th January 2006 "Dad's Army in East Kent" by David Collyer
15th February 2006 "Genealogy and Genetics" by Geoff Swinfield

Birchington Heritage Trust (talk starts at 7.30pm at Birchington Village Centre):

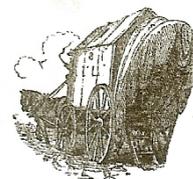
- 25th November 2005 "Rossetti and his Birchington Connections" by Mrs Pat Orpwood

Useful telephone numbers:

Organisation	Phone No.	Contact name/Notes
Margate Museum, The Old Town Hall, Market Place	231213	Bob Bradley, Curator
Margate Public Library – Local Studies Collection	223626	Tuesdays 2.00pm to 6.00pm, Fridays 2.00pm to 6.00pm and the first Saturday each month
Birchington Heritage Trust Museum, Birchington Library	846502	Monday mornings only, 9.30 to 12.00
Birchington Parish Archivist	842988	Jennie Burgess
Margate Historical Society	227574	Mick Twyman, Secretary
Isle of Thanet Historical Society	835587	Barry Hopper, Chairman
Isle of Thanet Archaeological Society	07906 360725	Val Robbins, Secretary
Kent Family History Society (Thanet Branch)	842933	Cliff Cole
Draper's Windmill Trust	226227	David Keep, Chairman
Margate Cemetery Trust	230274	Vera Jenkins
Friends of Margate Lifeboat	292348	Eleanor Kirby, Secretary
Friends of Quex	842040	Edna Elvin, Secretary
Friends of the Theatre Royal Margate	293397	David Rankin, Secretary
Turner Contemporary	280261	Victoria Pomery, Director
The Powell-Cotton Museum, Quex House, Birchington	842168	Museum closed during winter months
The Shell Grotto, Grotto Hill, Margate	220008	Sarah Vickery
Manston Spitfire & Hurricane Museum	821940	Museum closed during winter months
Cliftonville Residents' Association	226033	Keith Chadband, Chairman
Westgate & Westbrook Residents' Association	295326	Sylvie Nicholls, Treasurer

Special exhibition at Margate Museum

Don't forget to visit the special exhibition at Margate Museum to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The exhibition is entitled "Doing their Bit – The Home Front in East Kent" and runs until April 2006. Don't miss it.





Founded in 1968, the Margate Civic Society is a registered charity and is registered with the Civic Trust. It is also affiliated to both the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies and the Kent History Federation.

The Society's purpose and aims are to encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in Margate and its environs (Birchington, Westgate-on-Sea, Cliftonville, Westbrook, Garlinge, Acol, Sarre and St Nicholas-at-Wade); to stimulate public interest and care for the history and character of the area; and to encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general amenity and historical interest. To this end, Town Pride awards are given annually to those buildings which have been refurbished, cleaned or modified and which, in the opinion of the Society, have enhanced the appearance of the town. New high-quality buildings are also eligible for the award. The Society also vets planning applications and makes known to Thanet District Council any objections to those applications which it considers necessary.

Evening meetings are held monthly between October and May at The Walpole Bay Hotel, Fifth Avenue, Cliftonville. The lectures, mostly illustrated with slides, are interesting and of local interest; they are also varied in their appeal. A few afternoon meetings are sometimes also held. A newsletter is published four times a year.

Committee for 2005/06 – as elected at the Society's Annual General Meeting held on 6th October 2005:

President: Mr Ralph Handscomb
14 Eastern Esplanade, Cliftonville, Margate CT9 3AB (Tel: 293169)

Chairman: Mr Steve Villette
29 The Ridgeway, Cliftonville, Margate CT9 2TL (Tel: 221250)

Vice-Chairman: Mr Harry Scobie
45 Cornwall Gardens, Cliftonville, Margate CT9 2JG (Tel:291298)

Secretary: Mr Tony Snow
34 Royal Esplanade, Westbrook, Margate CT9 5EG (Tel: 221838)

Treasurer: Mrs Phil Johnson MBE
14 Sherwood Court, Dent-de-Lion Road, Westgate-on-Sea CT8 8NU (Tel: 831469)

Membership Secretary: Mrs Pat Snow
34 Royal Esplanade, Westbrook, Margate CT9 5EG (Tel: 221838)

Newsletter Editor: Mr James Brazier
"The Moorings", 25 Barnes Avenue, Westbrook, Margate CT9 5EQ (Tel: 298038)

Other Committee Members:
Mr Jack Pilcher, 7 Queen Bertha's Avenue, Birchington CT7 9BH (Tel: 833767)
Mr Garry Cowans, Flat 3, 21 Gordon Road, Cliftonville, Margate (Tel: 221938)
Mrs Margaret Main, 32 Gordon Road, Cliftonville, Margate CT9 2DN
Mrs Daphne Rowley, "Spring Cottage", 11 Pembroke Avenue, Westbrook, Margate (Tel: 292089)

If you are interested in joining our Society, please fill in the enrolment form below.

Enrolment Form

I enclose the sum of £

Name:

Address:

..... **Tel:**

Subscription rates for 2005/06:

	Individual	Joint	Junior (under 18)	Corporate
Annual	£5.00	£8.00	50p	£10.00
Life Membership	£40.00	£60.00	-	-

and send it to the Membership Secretary (Mrs Pat Snow), 34 Royal Esplanade, Westbrook, Margate CT9 5EG