



Margate Civic Society

*Margate Civic Society is a Founder
Member of Civic Voice*

AUTUMN 2021 NEWSLETTER ISSUE NO. 404

CHAIR'S REPORT

Dear Members

How are you all?

My goodness - it is hard to believe that we are in the middle of September and approaching autumn.

Although I expect many of you have not gone abroad this summer and had to cancel plans, I hope that you have at least had the opportunity to have a staycation or visited family members and friends. I have continued to remain cautious but have enjoyed spending time with my family and some of our friends, going out to lunch in Westgate-on-Sea and St Mildred's Bay and enjoying the peace and beauty of Westbrook (which I have visited since a child), strolling along the beach, collecting shells and paddling in the sea with my grandchildren and sometimes just on my own which I love. In spite of rather disappointing cloudy grey skies for the majority of the summer, when the sun has shone, the sea has been lovely and warm and the beaches cleaner than in previous years. Hopefully, we will have an Indian summer to compensate!

I hope that most of you are now all managing to stay well and safe and our best wishes go to anyone who is suffering from any ill health issues at this time, caring for a loved one or has been recently bereaved.

In Memoriam: I was shocked and saddened to learn that Jane Wenham-Jones of Broadstairs, who was **an author, journalist, presenter, interviewer, creative writing tutor and speaker** had passed away from cancer on 22 August this

year, at the early age of 59. Members may recall that Jane gave us a talk on 4 April 2019 which was thoroughly entertaining, amusing and enjoyable. My thoughts are with her family at this sad time.

Membership: A big welcome to our new member, Terry Dennett, who is a Margatonian by birth. He was born in May 1950 and attended Drapers Mills School, followed by Chatham House and finally attended the University of Manchester. After a short time with the old GPO, he joined the RAF and left in 1996 as a Squadron Leader. After working as a Company Secretary, Terry moved with his wife, Beryl, to France in 2002.

The Dennett Family originates from both East Northdown Farm and Manston Village. Terry's grandparents used to live in Reading Street where the family bible is held at the Church. His grandparents are buried in St Peter's Churchyard, whereas his parents are buried at the Cemetery on Manston Road. He had hoped to hold his 70th Birthday party at the Walpole Bay Hotel in February 2020 but due to Covid this was cancelled. However, he hopes to be able to attend one of our meetings in the future.

Meetings: In order to keep the Society's flag flying, the Committee have maintained contact by email and telephone and some of us have seen each other, with Sally Whitworth, Mike Wilton and Mike Thompson meeting up again in my garden last month for an alfresco lunch and an informal meeting. We are resuming normal service at the end of September, when we shall be meeting at Harry's house for a more formal Committee meeting!

Newsletter: This is the fourth quarterly newsletter edition for which Sally has been Editor, so please

continue to give your support and remember that you are most welcome to contribute to forthcoming editions by forwarding articles, photographs, postcards, life stories, news of events, book reviews, etc.

I hope you will enjoy reading the latest episode of Ralph's fascinating, colourful, varied life in Rhodesia whilst serving in the British South African Police. Ralph has led a remarkable life and this is definitely not for the faint-hearted!

Town Pride Awards 2020: Although we had intended to incorporate the presentation of the 2 Plaques on the evening of our AGM in October, before our guest speaker, changes have had to be made once again as the owner of 'Westbrook House' in Canterbury Road, Westbrook is unable to attend due to work commitments in Manchester. Arrangements will have to be made to present this plaque after our AGM. Hopefully we shall be able to present an award to our other winner. To remind you: the two winners receiving a **Town Pride Plaque and Framed Certificate** are:-

The Margate Caves Visitor Centre, 1 Northdown Road, Cliftonville

(In recognition of innovative and sensitive design, making a major contribution to the regeneration of an important community amenity and to the local area).

Westbrook House, 145 Canterbury Road, Westbrook, Margate

(In recognition of innovative, sensitive and eye-catching design, making a major historical contribution to Westbrook)

Lecture Programme: You will see that I have been working on finalising the 2021 programme and have already organised several for 2022. These cover various topics that hopefully will be of interest. Since lockdown has eased, speakers have increased their fees considerably (some up to 50%), adding mileage costs and these are now out of our budget. Covid has brought forth many changes and we are sadly unable to use the Walpole Bay Hotel for all our meetings, so I have pre-booked with them our 2 main annual events: Town Pride Awards and the AGM (when refreshments are served) and we are looking at suitable alternatives for the other meetings. Mike Wilton and I have been liaising on this and the

Holy Trinity Church Hall, Cliftonville has been booked for November and December. This venue was chosen as it is accessible and has parking and toilet facilities.



Holy Trinity Church Hall, Cliftonville

Venues for next year are yet to be confirmed. As this hall is used by other groups, we have been asked to set up the chairs before our meeting, which then have to be cleared afterwards. I would, therefore, be grateful if some able-bodied Members would offer to assist with this task. **If willing to volunteer: please get in touch.** We are also intending to sell teas and coffees with biscuits at some of these meetings, as there is no facility for refreshments provided in church halls! Things will be slightly different and will have a more 'community' feel but I am sure it will be equally friendly and enjoyable.

Historical Walks: I am delighted to share the following good news! Vice President, Robin Colyer is planning to return with a full programme of all his tours next April. However, he is intending to give an **Old Town Walk on Saturday, 6 November at 14:00**, duration of which will be 90 minutes. Booking is essential via Robin on **Mobile: 7878 537 448** and the group will be a maximum of 12. Should the weather be terrible, this will be rearranged to the following weekend. Walks are obviously dependent on the Covid situation.

An Opportunity: As we have not been able to organise trips for some time, you will be delighted to learn that Mike Thompson has kindly organised a special visit for Members, details of which are revealed within Mike's 'Planning Matters' article.

Community News:-

'Wilderness to Wonderland' Project (which enhances Civic Pride)

I hope you have found time to go along and see this excellent community gardening initiative which is organised by Rory Waitt and others **(including Iris Johnston)**. Their aim is to raise £3,900 to finish and maintain Westbrook Gardens and clean the weeds and rubbish from the pavements and gutters until Christmas!

As you know, Margate Civic Society contributed £80.00 to this very commendable project, which is much needed and has received community support. Should you wish to see an update and/or make a donation please see link below:-

https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/imagine?utm_term=3e6rXrrnY

The Margate School: On 11 September, I also attended a very special event for Margate which celebrated the Graduation of the first cohort of 6 Fine Art MA students having completed the Margate School's European Fine Art Masters Programme, Art, Society, Nature DNSEP (National Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art) assessment. The event consisted of the graduation ceremony at the Turner Contemporary, followed by a reception at the Margate School, auction by Bonhams (aiming to raise funds for future students), a tour of the premises and then music and celebrating in the evening. The day was very successful and was attended by many invited guests, including the Town Mayor and Mayoress of Margate and Arnold Schwartzman and his wife Isolde.

The Art, Society, Nature DNSEP is not only the first higher education qualification in Fine Art offered and delivered here in Margate but also the only European qualification of its kind in the UK.

The European qualification, The Diplôme National Supérieur d'Expression Plastique is validated by our friends L'Ecole Supérieure d'Art et Design Le Havre-Rouen, one of the oldest art schools in France.

Our congratulations to Uwe Derksen who has achieved so much and it is fantastic to see that all his dedication and hard work over several years is now coming together.

Geoff Orton: It is with regret that I have accepted Geoff's resignation, who will be standing down at the AGM, from his role as Secretary and Committee Member. I fully understand and

respect his decision but am most grateful that he will kindly continue to assist with the Newsletter Distribution and door duties at meetings which is very helpful and will be much appreciated by us all.

After joining Margate Civic Society in autumn 2011 and then becoming a Committee Member: Geoff kindly offered to take on the role of Secretary at the AGM on 4 October 2012, since which time he has been an exceptionally proactive, professional, enthusiastic Officer, working relentlessly for the Society and its Members. He has supported Civic Voice, the Local Plan, Civic and Heritage Open Days, Town Pride Awards, the Margate Clock Tower Restoration Project and attended numerous other meetings and events as the Society's representative, on both local and national levels. On behalf of the Committee, I should like to thank Geoff for his ongoing support, enthusiasm, diligence and dedication over the past ten years.

Way Forward: I am delighted that all the other current Committee members are willing to continue and Kate Wilson has offered to take on the role of Minutes Secretary. **Should anyone be interested in taking over the role of Secretary, I should be grateful if they would get in touch.**

Acknowledgements: Obviously, in order to ensure the longevity of our Society, Membership subscription fees are essential, so I should like to extend our most grateful thanks to those Members who kindly renewed their membership during this year and also for the generous donations and good wishes that have been received.

As always, I should also like to thank all the Committee for their ongoing support, professionalism, friendship and resilience.

I look forward to seeing you at 19:30 on 7 October in the **Dining Room** at the prestigious Walpole Bay Hotel, which will be the first meeting since we last met 19 months ago. I hope that Members will also renew their subscriptions at the AGM and continue to support our meetings and activities.

With my very best wishes

Pamela

LECTURE PROGRAMME OCTOBER 2021 TO MAY 2022 (Subject to COVID-19 Guidelines)

7 October

Guests: £4.50 nominal fee

Topic: Annual General Meeting (Renewal of Subs due). Presentation of 2020 Town Pride Plaques followed by “Bits That Don’t Fit!” (Stand-up History! Weird and wonderful historical square pegs). Please note prior to the raffle, there will be a collection for Cancer Research UK. Refreshments will then be served enabling an opportunity for Members to mingle. **Speaker:** Steve Hookins (After Dinner Speaker, historical presentations). **Venue:** The Walpole Hotel, Fifth Avenue Cliftonville. Start time 7.30 pm.

4 November

Guests: £3.00 Nominal fee

Topic: ‘The Life and Times of Edith Cavell’ (the story of the British heroine who died in Brussels in 1915. The Life and Times of Edith Cavell talk tells her story supported by photographs of existing artefacts of her life). This will be followed by the raffle. **Speaker:** Melanie Gibson-Barton **Venue:** Holy Trinity Church Hall, St Mary’s Avenue, Margate CT9 3TN. Start time 7.45 pm

9 December

Guests: £6.50 nominal fee

Topic: Christmas Soiree. Quiz, short film (or alternative), music, refreshments and raffle - details tbc. **Venue:** Holy Trinity Church Hall, St Mary’s Avenue, Margate CT9 3TN. Start time 7.45 pm

January No Meeting

3 February

Guests: £3.00 nominal fee

Topic: “The History of Epple Bay”. **Speaker:** John Robinson (MCS Member, local historian and Chair of Birchington Heritage Trust). **Venue/Time:** To be confirmed

3 March

Guests: £3.50 nominal fee

Topic: “The Hanbury Gardens on the Italian Riviera” - Sir Thomas Hanbury, a celebrated Victorian Quaker and philanthropist, his connection with Wisley, and the history of his renowned garden on the Italian Riviera. **Speaker:** Hugh Raggett (a retired, professional Emmy-award filmmaker). **Venue/Time:** To be confirmed

7 April

Guests: £3.00 nominal fee

Topic: “The Early Days of Westgate-on-Sea”. (the area before the town was built and the people who helped create what was to become an upmarket Victorian watering-hole). **Speaker:** Sally Whitworth, (MCS Membership Secretary/Newsletter Editor and Westgate-on-Sea Heritage Centre Newsletter Editor). **Venue/Time:** To be confirmed

12 May

Guests: £4.50 nominal fee

Topic: TOWN PRIDE AWARDS (followed by refreshments and raffle). **Venue/Time:** Walpole Bay Hotel. Start time 7.30 pm (to be seated by 7.15 pm)

Any suggestions for future topics, please feel welcome to get in touch.

More details about the venue for the February, March and April meetings to follow together with information about the October, November and December 2022 lectures.

In the last edition of the Newsletter, we left our President, Ralph Handscomb, part-way through his career as a Constable in the British South African Police in Rhodesia. The adventure continues.....



Ralph on patrol

A friend of mine was one McKenzie-Campbell, shift boss of no 1 mine, who had a concession to shoot rogue elephant in Northern Rhodesia. In Easter 1953, Campbell invited me to travel with him to Northern Rhodesia as he had been called upon to shoot a Rogue elephant which was raiding village granaries and terrorising the local residents. There was a rough road that led down to the Zambesi River, where we had built a raft and sometimes went fishing and hunting crocodile. He had arranged for four large dugout canoes to take us and our stores across the river, which was in spate. We landed the other side a mile further down because of the flow of the river. A large croc accompanied us most of the way (hoping we would fall in?). I was sitting on a pile of boxes and realised that if I took a shot at the beast he would thrash about and probably capsize the canoe. So - just watched him watching us. While base camp was pitched a short distance inland, Campbell and I set off along the riverbank looking for signs of the elephant. Suddenly a huge 'log' jumped up and slid down into the river. This croc was huge, about eighteen feet long and four feet across his back. We returned to camp. The following morning, we set out with guides from the village. We walked miles and around 4pm caught up with our quarry. He

charged. There was nowhere to hide, we were in open scrub country. Campbell waited until the elephant was about 20 yards away and shot him up through the mouth. He dropped like a stone. Now that day we had walked about 30 miles and, other than our party had not seen hide or hair of a soul. Within half an hour people came swarming out of the bush and were soon cutting away large chunks of meat to take to their kraals. We fed that night on elephant steak. The tusks were somewhere around 80 to 100 pounds apiece, and these were cut out and sent off to Livingstone with some of our gang. Campbell collected a nice reward for those.

On the way back to our base camp, I was handed some baobab tree fruit to suck. These were good to quench one's thirst. I was then handed a small bird, which one of our carriers had taken from a nest. It was too far back to put the little thing back in the nest, so I looked after it and named it Olly. It was an Eagle Owl and lived with me for months and became a lovely pet and followed me around like a dog. Unfortunately, it died some months later when I fed it some bully beef instead of pigeon. I was in the Wankie Game Reserve and taking Olly to the Game Warden for release in the wild and I didn't want to shoot in the reserve. Such a shame.



Ralph with Olly the Eagle Owl

I went up to Livingston a few times, to the Victoria Falls. This is an amazing sight. On one trip I went on a river cruse above the falls. It was not a good idea to think what would happen if the engine stopped. There was one hotel at the falls on the

Southern Rhodesian side, run by an ex BSAP, I think his name was Selby. We became friends but it was too expensive for me on my pay to stay there.

My next posting was to Chilamanzi in the Fort Victoria District. I have told this story so many times, but one day I was in the Charge Office (a thatched rondarval), when the African Sergeant came in to tell me there was a man wishing to make a complaint. This man entered the office and he had a hatchet stuck in his head! I decided to take a dying declaration from him as I suspected he would probably die as soon as the axe was removed as it was quite deeply imbedded. Having taken the declaration, I got him into the station truck, a crash gearbox Commer 15cwt, and drove him to Umvuma, 20 miles away on a strip road. A strip road for those who don't know is two strips of concrete the wheel width of a vehicle. On approaching another vehicle coming in the opposites direction you have to drive over putting left wheel into the dirt or latterite and the right wheel onto the left strip. Each time this happened the truck bounced alarmingly, and my passenger bounced up in his seat so hitting the roof with the axe and driving it further into his skull. Very nasty. On arrival at the hospital in Umvuma, the Rhodesian Doctor (whose name I have now forgotten, but he took out my appendix a few months before) agreed with me after looking at the patient that it was unlikely he would survive. The poor fellow went into surgery and came out dead. I then had to return to the Charge Office, pick up a couple of police, and drive about 20 miles to this man's kraal to arrest the culprit who had been named in the declaration. This case went to High Court in Fort Victoria, and the murderer was hanged.

Chilamanzi was a remote Police station, about 22 miles from Fort Victoria and 20 from Umvuma. Across the strip road were thousands of acres of Cold Storage Commission Farm running cattle at about one head per acre. There was also a lot of game. In the evening I would take my .22 rifle and cross the road into the wonderful wilderness. There were a lot of Kopjes to be explored and climbed. Before going out I would decide what I

was going to have for dinner and would not shoot anything until I found the quarry I had selected. One day while stalking guinea fowl, wearing sandals, a large black snake slid over my feet. I just held my breath and kept absolutely still; he went happily on his way, so I saw no reason to shoot it. A few minutes later I shot my dinner and returned to camp. This was a superb way to live. I loved it so much that I applied to the Game Department for a post as Ranger on my

completion of four years in the police. What a wonderful country it was. I was put on the short list but came second. I would also have to become a Rhodesian Citizen. I am very glad I didn't get the job seeing the way Zimbabwe is now.



Chilamanzi Charge Office

A leopard had been killing cattle on the Cold Storage land where I hunted for my dinner. Neville, who was the manager, asked me to try and shoot it. I hunted for this animal for two weeks every evening and each of my days off. Eventually he was hunting me! One day we came face to face and as he launched himself at me, I let him have two barrels of heavy shot. Another skin sent home for curing and tanning. The skin is draped over a chair in the hall.

There are so many stories I could relate which would fill a book. For example:

I was called out to a kraal about 20 miles from Chilamanzi. A man reported he had found his wife hanged in a tree. He said she had committed suicide. I took the truck out to the village with my African Sergeant. The woman was still hanging from the tree by her neck, very bloated and with a swarm of flies round her. I sent the sergeant up the tree to cut the rope and told the husband to

catch the body as it fell to the ground. The rope was cut, the body fell. The man took hold of the body and it just slipped through his hands leaving him with a handful of skin. I nearly threw up. We wrapped the body in a blanket, put it in the back of the truck and took it to Umvuma to the hospital for the post-mortem. As stated before, all deaths had to be investigated and a PM carried out with the investigating officer in attendance. Whilst the doctor did the PM I sat on an adjacent slab and took notes. He had a warped sense of humour and would suddenly toss over a piece of liver or lung or some other part to ask my opinion. After some time, I got used to it. He came to the head and trepanned the skull. The brain was bruised and the skull had a nasty fracture. Conclusion – This was murder not suicide.

On returning to the village, I interrogated the husband who then confessed he had hit her on the head and when he realised she was dead had hung her in the tree to make it look like suicide. He was told his rights, arrested and charged. Subsequently hanged. Now that is just the bare bones of one incident.

One day travelling out to the Kamativi Tin Mine to investigate a theft by motor bike with my African Sergeant riding pillion, I felt a blow on my leg. On stopping I saw I had run over a large Puff adder. Luckily for me, we always wore thick leather leggings when on motorcycle patrol. The fangs had lodged themselves in the leather and a fair amount of poison was dribbling down onto my boot. That was the only time I was attacked by a snake. But there were plenty of times when they were close.

We are now near the end of my time in Southern Rhodesia. My last posting was to Gutu, the nearest Police Station to Chilamanzi. Here I met up with George Goldie, the other white constable and we became very great friends, ending up on leave at the same time. One evening one of the servants came running in to say there was a large snake in the compound. I ran outside grabbing the fire axe as I went and there in the middle of the compound was a twenty-foot rock python. I

took off its head with the axe. Skinned it, dressed the skin as best I could and sent it to my brother-in-law, who was in the fur trade who had the skin properly tanned. I still have it.

Having served four years with the BSAP, I felt it was time to return to my family. I had promised my mother that I would return after three or four years. To be able to do this, I had to cash in my Pension and insurances. The Government did not pay for fares home like the Colonial Service. My intention was to take some leave and join the Colonial Service and return to Africa that way. I received my discharge papers and cash and booked passage by air to England.

The flight home was quite exciting. The company was Airwork Ltd and the plane was smaller than a Dakota, with twenty eight passengers, four stewardesses and three crew. We took off from Salisbury airport and dropped down at various airports, the main ones I remember were Lusaka in Northern Rhodesia and Entebbe in Uganda. We flew so low over Mt Kilimanjaro that we could see down its core. Khartoum in the Sudan was a night stop. We were housed on a large boat on the Nile where we had a meal and slept. The whole of the deck was covered in with close wire netting and we soon found out why. As night fell the air became black with swarms of midges. Wadi Halfa in Egypt was another night stop, then Marsa Matruh for lunch. Travelling over the forests and jungles and the deserts, we were flying low enough to see herds of animals, villages, camel trains etc. - all truly spectacular. The plane took off again for Malta, crossing the Mediterranean. We stayed the night in the Phonexia Hotel in Valetta. The following day we stopped for lunch in Lisbon and landed at London Airport late afternoon.

Following leaving the British South African Police service, Ralph joined the Diamond Trading Company, part of De Beers, and was posted to Sierra Leone as a diamond trader. In the next edition of the Newsletter, we'll cover that part of his adventurous and interesting life.

PLANNING MATTERS by Mike Thompson

Following my lengthy reports in the last newsletter concerning proposed legislative changes to the Planning Process (updates will follow in due course), I thought something a little closer to home might prove interesting.

Members may well be aware of the changes underway at the former Hornby Hobbies buildings at Westwood.

These proposed changes involve transforming the existing buildings into a state-of-the-art, brand new, visitor attraction - Kent's very own Railway Museum. In January this year, Thanet District Council granted full planning permission for the project to transform the 130,000 square foot buildings into the new attraction and bring the associated economic benefits to the area.



Architect's impression of the finished building – courtesy of Haptic Architects.

I now quote from The One:One Collection website - theonetoonecollection.co.uk

'In the One:One Collection, the stars of the show aren't scale models, but the real thing - iconic locomotives, rolling stock, maintenance vehicles and memorabilia - 1:1 scale and up close. The Collections new home isn't yet open to the public, but you can follow its progress as the work is expected to be completed in phases and will take three to four years, subject to construction schedules. Regular updates will be posted on the website and Facebook page'.

Already on site though are 'Bittern' - an A4 class 4-6-2 locomotive, built in 1937 and sister to the famous 'Mallard' which on the 3rd July 1938

recorded the fastest steam locomotive speed in the world of 126 mph.



Bittern - sister to the Mallard. Photo by Adrian Smith

Also on site is BR 45379 - a 'Black Five' class 5MT 4-6-0 locomotive. These were a mixed traffic class, a 'do anything, go anywhere', type introduced in 1934.



A 'Black Five' class 5MT 4-6-0 locomotive. Photo by David Babaian

Historic coaches also feature including a GWR Special Saloon coach, an Officers Saloon, a luggage van used as the Churchill funeral hearse and a rare streamlined coach from 1937.



The luggage van used as Churchill's funeral hearse. Photo by David Babaian.

Other exhibits include a Breakdown Crane and a Wickham Trolley used as a personnel carrier. There is a diesel electric locomotive from the 1960's, a Eurostar power car with First Class carriage and a wide range of railway memorabilia'.



Eurostar. Photo by David Babaian

If all this has whetted your appetite and aroused a little excitement in those amongst us who well remember the journeys taken on steam trains in our youth, I have the greatest of pleasure in letting you know that Margate Civic Society members have received an invite from Mr Frank Martin, Collection Director, to receive a guided tour of the facility.

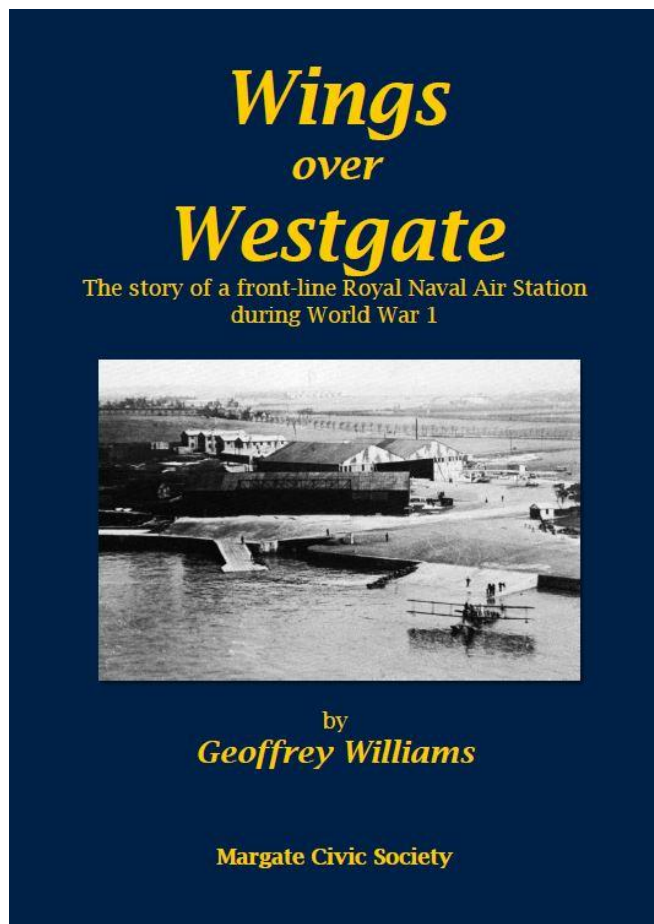
We are very privileged to have received this kind offer and we must thank Mr Frank Martin, Director, who is a very busy man, for making this possible.

The visit has been arranged for Friday 16th November 2021 at 2.15pm. Parking on site is very limited at present and we have been specifically asked to reduce traffic movements to the site by car-sharing wherever possible or by using public transport. Any car parking considered essential should be made off-site in the surrounding area. Your co-operation in this matter would be appreciated please.

This invite is specifically for the membership of Margate Civic Society only and requests to attend should be made to me personally. Contact by phone or email are both acceptable and my contact details are to be found on the back page of this newsletter.

I do hope as many of you as possible will come and take advantage of early access ahead of the public opening, to look at what is sure to become a major visitor attraction for the area.

MIKE THOMPSON



WINGS OVER WESTGATE

The Margate Civic Society has recently had more copies of the book *Wings over Westgate* printed. If you would like to purchase a copy, priced at £12.50, they will be on sale at the Society's monthly meetings.

CHANGES IN THE LANDSCAPE

In early 1842 one of the largest land-owners in this area died. His name was Gibon Rammell and his death, aged 72, was to dramatically change the fortunes of not only his immediate family but also the area around where he lived. Most of the land he owned was to become land on which the estate town of Westgate-on-Sea was built and, following on with the railway theme in this newsletter, two of his sons became well-known Victorian railway surveyors and inventors.

An auction notice at the time of Gibon's death advised:-

"For Sale. A capital compact property called **Street Lodge Estate**, comprising the family residence called Street Lodge, with all requisite domestic offices, farm premises and bailiff cottage, together with 141 acres of capital land in a ring fence, containing a deep stratum of good brick earth. **Street Green Farm**, a substantial brick-built residence and 110 acres of land between the described property and the sea, which forms two fine bays called Westgate and Marsh Bay. Together with a range of substantial brick buildings, partly on lease to the government and altogether producing a rental of about £52 per annum, facing the sea called **Westgate** in the western extremity of the **Street Green Estate**. An extensive brickfield with cottage, stables, etc.

A freehold estate called **Nash Court** close to the turnpike road from Margate to Ramsgate comprising 388 acres of arable land. A modern and old farmhouse with all requisite farm buildings and a cottage and garden, part of which will be sold in lots. Twenty acres of rich freehold arable land called **Garlinge Farm** with six cottages adjoining. An estate at Hillsborough of about 58 acres. Two freehold houses called **Fort Houses** in the town of **Margate**".

In total, Gibon Rammell's estate, excluding his own home at Dent-de-Lion comprised at least 500 acres. Street Lodge and Street Green Farm are on the 'Street' (the road to Canterbury) and still stand today. Dent-de-Lion House is now sadly demolished.

Gibon's family appears to have moved from the Eastry area (where they were farmers and landowners) to Margate around 1780. In 1800, at

the age of 30, Gibon called himself a 'yeoman farmer', living at 'Street' and was involved with a consortium to bring the turnpike road to Ramsgate and Margate. He married Elizabeth Webster, originally from Bermondsey, in 1811 at St John the Baptist, Margate, when he was 41. Elizabeth was 17 years his junior and this was his first marriage. They went on to have 13 children between 1813 and 1827, a child almost every year, not uncommon at all at that time. The children were all born at 'Street near Margate'. The oldest boy was their second child, Gibon Bushell Rammell, born in 1814. For seven generations, since 1686, the family tradition was that the oldest boy be called Gibon.

A copy of Gibon's will showed he was living at Dent-de-Lion House at the time of his death. The will stated that *everything* – which meant *all* his property - was to be sold and money from the sale of the property to be put into one pot to be administered by his Executors. This ensured that all of the children would have a share in the money he left. There was no special treatment for his oldest son, Gibon Bushell Rammell, farming at Nash Court. Gibon also made very sure his daughters and his wife were well provided for after his death. He left his wife all his household goods, and instructed executors to pay her, within 3 months of his death, the sum of £100 (about £10,000 today) and that the capital from the property sales should remain as a lump sum until the death of his wife, the interest on this would be paid yearly to his wife and children. His will was unsuccessfully challenged by his older son in Court the year after his death.

Gibon's death happened at a time when there was great unrest in the countryside (the Swing Riots) and land prices were low. Suddenly, a large swathe of land became available in the Garlinge/Margate area and at a relatively cheap price too. The astute solicitor, Herman Dirs Merten working in Margate knew there were plans to build a railway extension from Herne Bay to Ramsgate and he purchased much of the land previously owned by Gibon. Firstly, the shrewd Herman sold, at a very good profit, some of the land he had purchased to the London Chatham and Dover Railway Company. He purchased Street Lodge, which he then modernised and gentrified the name to the grander sounding

Streete Court. Herman Mertins also had a grand idea to build an estate town – Westgate-on-Sea – on land that Gibon Rammell previously owned.

Gibon's will had severe repercussions for his oldest son. Gibon junior had to leave the 'new' Nash Court (which still stands today on Nash Road) a property that was probably specially built for him and his young family, and find another home and livelihood. Gibon junior left the area and never returned to farming or to live in Thanet (he died in Devon). Perhaps Gibon senior purposely made sure all of his sons left a life in agriculture behind. He gave his male children a good education at the Dane Hill Academy Margate and rather than become farmers, they became surveyors, solicitors and engineers.

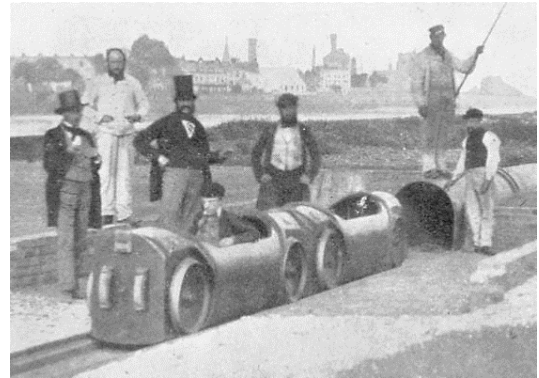
Thomas Webster Rammell (the second boy in the Rammell family) went on to become an inventor as well as a civil engineer/surveyor. He filed over twenty-eight patents in forty years including one for a pneumatic railway and, in 1864, constructed a trial line in the grounds of the Crystal Palace Park at Sydenham for an "atmospheric vacuum railway". For two months, passengers were carried to the entrance of the Crystal Palace and back, thirty at a time, paying fourpence for the return trip, by this vacuum railway system.



Above: Thomas Rammell's railway at Sydenham. A carriage with a large collar of bristles was sucked along an air-tight tunnel.

The pneumatic rail was seriously considered as a mean of rail transport and the first section of a line between Euston and Holborn was opened in November 1865 with distinguished guests enjoying the novel experience of being blown and sucked back and forth. However, Thomas got into severe financial problems and the railway failed through lack of investment. In fact, his invention

was the forerunner of the type of vacuum system used in department stores, as the way of sending money up to an accounts office, rather than a useable railway. Thomas died in 1879 unaware of other uses his pneumatic system could be put to.



Another of Thomas Rammell's experiments with a vacuum system. Thomas Rammell is probably in the centre with the top hat.

Another of Gibon's sons, Charles Rammell, became an architect and surveyor and laid out railway lines all over the country, particularly North Staffordshire. He was appointed by Robert Stephenson (George Stephenson's son) to survey a line in Norway and then in 1854 went to India to work on the route through to Constantinople. While surveying in Turkey in very high temperatures and undertaking very arduous work, he became ill. He died suddenly at the home of the British Vice Counsel in Turkey, aged only 33.

Gibon Rammell's wife reached a great age, outliving all but 3 of her 13 children. She died in 1875 in West Ham (after Gibon's death she, like all but one of her children, never returned to live in Thanet). She had received £200 annually (about £20,000 in today's money) in half yearly instalments until her death. Gibon's will stated that this payment would continue as long as she remained a widow, which she did – living to the age of 88.

The Rammells appear not to be well known in this area now – despite owning so much land here in the early to mid 1800s. Gradually the family lost status and wealth and six of Gibon's sons died either unmarried or childless. The last of the Gibon Rammells, Gibon's great grandson, died unmarried and childless in Birmingham in the 1930's, a post office clerk, perhaps not fully aware of his great grandfather's status and wealth in the Isle of Thanet.

Sally Whitworth

Margate Civic Society

www.margatecivicsociety.org.uk



Founded in 1968, the Margate Civic Society is a registered charity and a founder member of Civic Voice. It was also both an affiliated member of the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies and a member of the Kent History Federation but, sadly, both those organisations have recently been wound up.

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 digitally illustrated, are interesting and of local interest; they are also varied in their appeal. A Newsletter is published four times a year.

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



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