

Margate, Kent: The first seaside resort

World Regional Geography
by Lew, Hall & Timothy

Virtual Field Trip

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Photos Taken: 2004–05



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Outline



- ▶ Margate, located on the south-east tip of England on the Isle of Thanet, was one of the world's first seaside resorts in the way that we would understand them in the present-day
- ▶ Its rise and fall, and planned redevelopment therefore provides significant insights into tourism
- ▶ The waterfront area has had marginal changes in terms of beach infrastructure, e.g. removal of pavilions as well as the addition of a block of apartments in the 1960s and accompanying retail outlets which was a failed attempt at revitalisation.

The first seaside resort



- ▶ Margate became the first English seaside resort in 1736 when a channel was cut to Wrights York Hotel on the site of the present-day Royal York mansions. Salt water would enter at every tide and a commercial bath was established.
- ▶ Many of the Georgian buildings which remain are being restored with some being used as apartments while others remain used for holiday accommodation

Early health tourism

- ▶ Sea bathing and the drinking of salt water was advocated for health purposes and early developments can therefore be regarded as a form of health tourism. Because access was primarily by sea and low-cost access was difficult the earliest health visitors tended to be quite wealthy.
 - ▶ The development of bathing machines by the Quaker Benjamin Beale in the late 18th century also allowed for direct immersion of people into the sea waters.
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Royal Seabathing Hospital

- ▶ The Royal Seabathing Hospital was founded in 1791 and was England's first specialised hospital. Salt water baths and 'sea air' were advocated as a means of managing consumption (TB) then rife in rapidly urbanising England. Easy sea access from London was a factor in its development. The site is undergoing redevelopment after being derelict for several years.
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The importance of transport

- ▶ Changes in transport technology were crucial for making Margate attractive to the middle and working-classes of London who would travel either for daytrips or holidays by steamer or train. Margate Jetty which opened in 1855 replacing a former wooden structure provided steamship access. The last steamship sailed in 1956 and the jetty was destroyed in 1978 and never replaced.
- ▶ The opening of rail connections in the second-half of the 19th century, especially with London, also encouraged tourism development

Promenading

- ▶ Many visitors to Margate came to take in the air and the entertainments and 'promenade' (walk) along the sea front instead.
- ▶ In the 1860s a bathing platform at the base of the Cliftonville cliffs operated by the Pettman Family provided safe and discrete sea bathing. The mile-long platform operated until 1939.



Sea-bathing

- ▶ Much sea-bathing was highly restricted in terms of water access until well into the Twentieth Century with access being restricted to bathing machines which were towed into the water by horses (see right of following picture). But restricted access was social (and legal) in nature in terms of how much bare flesh could be shown, costume, where and when entry was made into the water, mixed bathing, and activities engaged in.

Marine Parade Early Twentieth Century



Stengel & Co. Dresden Berlin

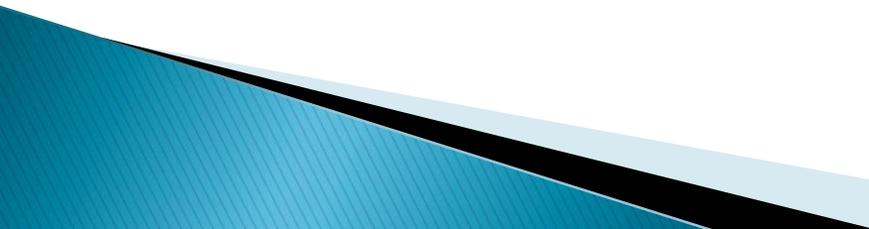
Marine Parade and Clocktower

Margate

Social Revolution at the Seaside

- ▶ The late 1920s and 1930s were a significant turning point in the nature of activities as a tan became fashionable as this was the 'look' of celebrity Hollywood film stars and models
 - ▶ The 1930s and the post-war years were also significant because of the gradual changes towards women's bathing fashions (culminating in the bikini in the 1960s) and attitudes towards mixed bathing. Several salt-water pools were established in this period along the seafront.
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Safe seabathing

- ▶ In 1926 a large open-air seawater bathing pool was opened that was backed by a theatre, dance hall, arcades and numerous restaurants and bars
 - ▶ Though at one time bathing was segregated over time mixed bathing was allowed.
 - ▶ However, the complex began to experience substantial decline from the 1960s on as tourist tastes changed and visitor numbers dropped, heated indoor swimming pools became available, and the infrastructure was not renewed.
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Dreamland



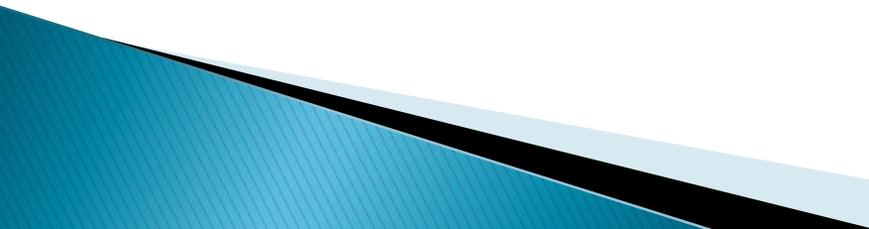
- ▶ Dreamland amusement park was one of the top ten paying attractions in the UK until the early 1980s. However, the growth of rival attractions and a failure to invest in new infrastructure led to its decline. The brick building featured was finished in 1939.
- ▶ In 2008 the UK's oldest wooden roller coaster and The Scenic Railway at Dreamland were destroyed in a fire although there are plans to redevelop the Dreamland site as a heritage amusement park.

European assistance



- ▶ The decline of tourism in the 1970s and 1980s along with other industrial decline has led to the region receiving European Union and other government funding
- ▶ Tourism still remains as important to the local economy although in new forms such as heritage tourism and arts and culture. Although there is substantial resistance to these developments from some townspeople because they are not regarded as ‘in keeping’ with Margate’s traditional positioning as a cheap mass holiday destination
- ▶ Funding from the  Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Union has been used to assist in the restoration of the historic

Old Town Hall and Market Square Redevelopment

- ▶ The first market was established in 1631 with a Charter for a twice-weekly Margate being given in 1777. By 1885 there were 15 fish stalls, 19 fruit and vegetable stalls, and nine butchers. The last fruit and vegetable stall closed down in 1982.
 - ▶ External funding has been used to restore the old town hall (left) and other historic buildings and revitalise the surrounding area. However, the measures have only had limited success.
 - ▶ It is hoped that the area will eventually have an arts and cultural focus.
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The Turner Legacy



- ▶ Margate has a long association with art, in the late 20th Century with artists such as Tracy Emin and Chas & Dave, and in the 19th Century with Turner who lived near the harbour for 20 years with Mrs. Sophie Booth and painted some of his finest seascapes there.
- ▶ Unfortunately the Turner connection was for a long time ignored by local agencies because of the moral concern over Turner's relationship

The Turner Contemporary

- ▶ A Turner gallery is now being constructed in order to celebrate the artist's connection to the area and to further promote the revitalisation of the harbourfront and old town area through cultural tourism.
- ▶ It is hoped that the Turner gallery will revitalise the town in the same way that St Ives was by the introduction of a branch of the Tate Gallery

The Future

- ▶ Margate and surrounding regions have still been able to attract daytrippers and some low cost holidaymakers but the attraction of higher spending visitors will undoubtedly rest on its capacity to promote the Turner Gallery and integrate its development with that of arts and culture in the old town precinct. However, this will be something in terms of reimagining that will be at odds with Margate's image for the last 100 years as a cheap holiday destination for Londoners in which the key products were amusement arcades, bingo, jellied eels and winkles.