

# An Introduction

Ramsgate and its surrounding area has a long and rich history. There is much to learn about the first settlers in the area and how its population changed over time. In this study, children will gain an understanding of how Ramsgate became the place we know and love today.

## What you need to know

Before exploring the history of the area, it's important to identify some of the geographic changes that took place around Ramsgate during the Mesolithic period. In around 8,000 BC, the sea levels around the UK rose and this flooded an area of land attaching the UK to Europe. This land was known as 'Doggerland' and its flooding separated the country from mainland Europe. This had a huge impact on the location where Ramsgate now sits – creating an island known as Thanet.

The Isle of Thanet was disconnected from nearby Kent, separated by a river which was known as the Wantsum Channel. This channel existed for thousands of years until the 16th century when it silted up – leaving just a stream which is still there today.

During the Mesolithic period, historians have found evidence that small encampments were set up along the channel and they would have travelled around the island, hunting and gathering food.

When the Bronze Age began, evidence suggests that these encampments began to grow near an area known as Cliffsend. Round barrows were discovered – suggesting a collection of people lived here and had unique rituals to honour their dead. Enclosures existed near the site of the barrows, with several pottery items, coins and more being discovered here. A unique burial site in Cliffsend provided more evidence of a unique belief system, as many of the skeletons found, had unusual burials with evidence of sacrificial deaths.

Little is known about the area during the Iron Age, except a few coins which were found close to Chalk Hill. These coins are some of the earliest ever found in Britain – suggesting that people continued to live in the area.

More considerable growth began with the invasion of the Roman army in AD 43. In what was then the Wantsum Channel - between the Isle of Thanet and mainland England - a small island known as Richborough, was the first location that the invading army established control over. They built defensive ditches and eventually a port on the island – ready to expand into England and begin their large scale invasion.

After the departure of the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons arrived with a large force in AD 447. In an area known as Ozengell Grange, a large cemetery revealed skeletons, necklaces, brooches, bowls and other pottery – suggesting a flourishing settlement in the area.



When the Normans invaded in 1066, things changed again and this can be considered the beginning of Ramsgate as we know it. The oldest church in Ramsgate – The Church of St Laurence - originates from this time period. By 1275, settlements would have grown around where Ramsgate is situated, and for the first time it was recorded as Remisgat – a small settlement with fisherman cottages, a pier and storage houses.

By the early 18th century, people living in Ramsgate combined fishing with farming, depending on the time of year. Throughout the Georgian era (1714-1837), the town developed and grew.

The harbour was improved and by the mid 18th century, fishing boats from Ramsgate were travelling further afield to catch fish. The thriving fishing trade led to other industries such as boat building and repair, rope making and producing sailcloth.

A storm in 1748 highlighted the need for an improved harbour and by 1779, the harbour looked much more like the one we know today. There were also buildings built during the Georgian era such as Wellington Crescent and The Clock House.

During the Georgian era, visiting the seaside became a popular holiday for richer people. A newspaper article from 1754 mentions a bathing machine at Ramsgate. With transport links to London, the town became an ever increasingly popular destination for tourists. Even Princess Victoria enjoyed a donkey ride on Ramsgate Beach in 1823.

When Princess Victoria became Queen Victoria in 1837, it heralded the start of the Victorian era (1837-1901). This era is known for the progress made in industry, science, and culture. It was a time of great change and development, and Ramsgate experienced many of these transformations.

During the Victorian era many new schools and other buildings were built in Ramsgate, some of which are still around today. It wasn't until 1891 that schools that were free to attend were introduced. At this time, it also became law that all children between the ages of 5 and 13 had to attend school.

Ramsgate's first railway station opened in 1848. This made it possible for many Londoners, including working-class families, to visit the town for day trips or weekend excursions. The railway significantly increased visitor numbers to the town. In 1863, a new station was opened at the harbour which made it even easier for visitors to get to the seaside.

It was a time where entertainment blossomed in Ramsgate with parks, roller skating rinks and theatres opening in the town. The town even had a famous resident for a couple of months when renowned artist, Vincent van Gogh, visited in 1876.



Development of Ramsgate continued into the 1900s, and the town flourished as a seaside resort for Post Victorian Brits. Throughout the early 1900s, new additions were added such as the West Cliff Estate with an extended beach. Things drastically began to change though as soon as Britain entered the World Wars.

In 1914, World War 1 broke out and Ramsgate's location made it vulnerable to attacks from sea and air. Ramsgate gained a reputation as Britain's most bombed seaside town. Zeppelin airships dropped bombs from above damaging buildings and taking lives. By the end of the war in 1918, Ramsgate had been targeted by 396 bombs and 343 shells, resulting in the deaths of 45 people and injuries to 93 others.

Just over 20 years later, World War 2 would begin and once again, Ramsgate would be the target for attacks. In preparation for war, children were evacuated and the Mayor and borough engineer fought for underground shelters to be built. The Ramsgate Tunnels had seats for 35,000 people, but it could hold around 60,000 in total. The population of Ramsgate was around 33,000 at the time. The town was often bombed by enemy aircraft but thanks to the shelters, the number of fatalities and casualties was thankfully low.

After the war the town saw a steady decline, as more people chose to go on holiday abroad due to cheaper air travel. This had a huge lasting effect on the town. Through redevelopment, however, the town still makes efforts to remember its past whilst redesigning a town for the future. One example of this, is the creation of the Royal Sands development which hopes to bring new life to this once popular seaside resort.

## Resources

Our key enquiry questions, sources, PowerPoints, activities, and other resources will help to build children's understanding of their local area of Ramsgate and answer the question 'How has Ramsgate changed over time?'

## Get in touch

Is there an area of local history you'd love to see on our Local History Hub?  
Get in touch to learn how we can work together! Email

[LocalHistory@tpet.co.uk](mailto:LocalHistory@tpet.co.uk)  
to find out more.



# Local History

Historic England and Teacher's Pet have come together to bring you a collection of free resources that you can use in your local history teaching.

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Historic England



Teacher's Pet

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## Who are Teacher's Pet?

Teacher's Pet have been providing downloadable and playable educational content to early years and primary school teachers for over 14 years. We cover all areas of the curriculum and use a team of in-house teachers and designers to create engaging and memorable concepts, that the children will love.

## Why local history?

At [Teacher's Pet](#) we want to empower primary school teachers by giving them the tools they need to deliver inspiring and thoughtful lessons about the local area and its history. We believe local history teaching has such an important part to play in a child's wellbeing – helping to give children a sense of pride in where they live.

Our Local History project is designed to provide teachers across the UK with everything they need to successfully carry out a full scheme of teaching about their local area, through key enquiry questions and source led activities.

Working with [Historic England](#) gives us access to archived maps and photos for resources and information from knowledgeable local historians, as well helping us to provide the content to you free of charge.

For more information about our Local History project or to find out more about Teacher's Pet Classroom Resources, please visit our website.