

Merry Christmas

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 PLEASE RECYCLE

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TUNNEL TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF RAMSGATE TUNNELS TEAM

Season's Greetings from the Ramsgate Tunnels Team. May we wish you the very best for Christmas and the New Year.

It's hard to believe another year has gone by and we would like to thank you for your continued support and patience. The Tunnels project has continued in the background and there have been some significant developments throughout the year.

In February Thanet District Council awarded the project a grant of £20,000 to help kick-start the venture. This was a very welcome boost and the team set to work on devising a plan to make best use of the money. In May the project moved from the Governance of Ramsgate Town Council to that of the Ramsgate (Heritage Regeneration) Trust (RHRT). You can learn more about the role of the Trust elsewhere in this publication.

The Tunnels Team have been busy seeking advice and overcoming problems associated with the underground environment. Site visits and advice has been provided by a number of underground venues across the country and abroad. In July team members visited the Canadian National Memorial at Vimy Ridge in France where they have tunnels similar to those at Ramsgate. The Senior Manager of the memorial gave us an insight into problems encountered and solutions found. Help and advice has also been freely given by Chislehurst Caves, Stockport Tunnels, Hellfire Caves (West Wycombe), Williamson Tunnels (Liverpool), Victoria Tunnels (Newcastle) and English Heritage at the Dover Castle Wartime Tunnels. The Team now has a good understanding of how to manage the special environment.

In August plans were at a stage where a limited public opening in 2014 could be announced which was a major milestone for all those involved. The delivery phase could now begin.

Going Green in the Tunnels

With vast distances to be covered in preparing and maintaining the tunnels transport of heavy loads was one of the problems to be overcome. To solve this problem the Trust has acquired an electric pedestrian controlled vehicle which will be able to negotiate the narrow Air Raid Precaution tunnels. Carrying up to 1½ tonnes the vehicle is an ideal solution to the problem and being road legal its use is not confined to the tunnels.



Looking Forward ...

As 2014 approaches RHRT are in the final stages of negotiating with T.D.C. to take control of the tunnels. January should see the signing of an agreement that will safeguard the interests of all parties and work is expected to start towards the end of January.

When work commenced on the shelters in 1939 the Borough Council specified that Contractors were under an obligation to employ at least 80% of labour locally. In keeping with this tradition the Ramsgate Tunnels Team has a policy of using local suppliers and contractors wherever possible.

When tenders were invited for the first stage of works to clear the tunnels of debris and contamination the team was delighted when local company DDS Demolition came back with the most competitive quote.

Downfast Demolition was started by Les and Lorraine Ray in 1978 when they operated from a small yard in Ashburnham Road, Ramsgate. Les and Lorraine grew the business into one of Thanet's most successful group of companies currently employing 54 people. Les will be well known amongst locals for his community spirit and his association with the Ramsgate Amateur Boxing Club where he still takes an active role as President.

DDS is now managed by Les and Lorraine's son Wesley although parental guidance is never far away. We strongly suspect DDS's competitive tender may have been influenced by the family's Ramsgate roots and love of the town. We're certainly delighted to have them on board for this first and most crucial stage of delivering the project.

Further funding for infrastructure has been applied for and the result of this should be known by the end of January. Among many other things that are happening behind the scenes arrangements are being made for an opening event to be held on the seafront.

As the project progresses so the workload increases. In the New Year we will be looking for volunteers to help with the many tasks to be completed by June. Among the roles to be filled are the essential Tour Guides who will bring the project alive. Initially these will be volunteer led until the project has sufficient reserves to offer secure full time posts. If you have an interest in this please watch out for developments.

January promises to be a very busy month. If you want to be the first to know what's happening you can sign up as a [Friend of Ramsgate Tunnels](#). Alternatively you can follow us on [Facebook](#) but please don't forget to like us as this may help in our funding bids.

Supported by ...



RHRT News

An update from the Ramsgate (Heritage Regeneration) Trust



Amalgamation.

From the inception of Ramsgate (Heritage Regeneration) Trust Ltd (RHRT), it was the intention of the directors to keep both the guarantors and the members informed of progress, utilising a quarterly e-magazine entitled "RHRT News". In practice the lack of person power to produce the document and the erratic nature of progress in regenerating heritage, made it unviable to achieve a constant output for the e-magazine. Although we were not always able to report progress, it did not mean that no progress was being made behind the scenes to achieve our goals.

Now we have embarked on our first practical project for the town we have decided to amalgamate two publications "The Tunnel Times" and "RHRT News" this will keep both groups of supporters informed of future activities of the trust in relation to the tunnels and its wider aims.

RHRT and the Ramsgate Tunnels

The original intention for Ramsgate Tunnels was that RHRT would be the overseeing official body but because of Jubilee Peoples' Millions rules, the feasibility (first) phase had to be retained by Ramsgate Town Council who had spearheaded the JPM bid.

The second phase of Ramsgate Tunnels is now underway and it is under the supervision of RHRT. In this phase the aim is to achieve public access into the tunnel complex so that visitors can experience this unique environment. You will find more information on this exciting phase of the project in other sections of this magazine.

The original Ramsgate Tunnels Heritage Group has been re-branded Ramsgate Tunnels Heritage Project to avoid the confusion that they are a separate group from RHRT. The old Tunnels Group committee structure has been replaced with a more flexible management team, many members of the team were on the original committee, which reports back to the RHRT board of directors, so avoiding any duality of responsibility. We are confident that the Ramsgate Tunnels Heritage Project is in good shape to go forward from strength to strength and hopefully, in the course of time, achieve all the objectives set out in the vision produced at the feasibility (first) phase.

Tunnels Planning Application.

An application has been made to Thanet District Council for the re-opening of the tunnels as a leisure attraction for the town. This application will soon be available to view on the UKplanning website www.ukplanning.co.uk/thanet under application No F/TH/13/0980 There is also a need to apply for change of use because the previous leisure use is deemed to have been abandoned.

Other RHRT News.

Ramsgate (Heritage Regeneration) Trust Ltd is still committed to the wider aims of regenerating the heritage assets of the town of Ramsgate. We originally identified **six** heritage assets in the town which were seriously at risk and have actively encouraged progress to achieve suitable new uses for these structures. There has been progress on some of them either by RHRT or other concerned groups in the town.

Albion House.

Albion House was sold into the private sector by Thanet District Council and work is now underway to convert it into a boutique hotel. The trust supported this action because a hotel use retains the building as one freehold unit, rather than being split into flats, which would have fragmented the freehold and made it almost impossible to recover in the future. Albion House was built originally as a private residence, but probably being too large for one modern residence, converting it to a hotel is a close second and additionally provides public access to this lovely building.

The Royal Victoria Pavilion.

There has been some controversy about this in the local press recently, but the trust remains committed to getting this building back into use at the earliest opportunity. Thanet District Council has indicated they are willing to provide an extended lease to a new occupier, which is a useful informative addition to the marketing strategy. The responsibility for disposal of the lease on the building remains squarely with The Rank Organisation and their property director has indicated directly to RHRT that they are not willing to negotiate with any organisation which has a lesser financial clout than their own organisation. This seriously limits the field of potential future leaseholders.

Westcliff Hall (Motor Museum)

This has now been re-branded Project Motorhouse, the sterling work of Janet Fielding and her team is getting to grips with the many complications of refurbishing this sunken building, which has a public promenade on its roof. The structure of the building is known technically as composite construction, which consists of a steel frame encased in concrete. Unfortunately when rust sets into the steelwork beneath the concrete, it not only spalls off the concrete surface but it also brings into question the stability of the whole structure. Best wishes for a prosperous New Year to Project Motorhouse.

Clock House.

Now under the ownership of The Preston Steam Trust, limited opening hours of the newly resurrected Ramsgate Maritime Museum have been of concern recently and RHRT together with The Ramsgate Society have contacted The Preston Steam Trust to see if we can be of assistance in achieving an improvement to this situation.

West-cliff Lift.

Any hopes of restoration for this lift have taken a step backwards recently with the demise of all ferry services from Ramsgate. There have been feasibility studies for revival of the fortunes of Port Ramsgate and a substantial change of direction for the port may inject a suitable impetus for the regeneration of this local West-cliff area. We are constantly monitoring the situation in the hope of some future optimism.

West-cliff Chine.

We have been in discussion with Thanet District Council about the ongoing arrangements for the chine, it has now been incorporated in the joint study by RHRT and The Ramsgate Society into the Ramsgate Heritage Promenades and we hope to bring forward positive proposals for the whole of the cliff-top seafront area from West-cliff Chine to King George VI Memorial Park on the East-cliff. This now has the further complication of how it can be integrated with proposals for a series of Ramsgate Neighbourhood Plans. Discussions for this are ongoing.

We look forward to bringing you future news of progress in all or any of these projects. Have a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New year for the whole of Ramsgate.