



LIGHTS, CAMERA, REACTION
Presentation night in Custom House goes well



CHRISTMAS COMPETITION
WIN A CASE
of 'Blitz' beers in time for Christmas



TUNNEL TALES
Churchill visits the town after the 'Blitz'

ISSUE 4
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TUNNELTIMES

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF RAMSGATE TUNNELS HERITAGE GROUP

SHINING MORE LIGHT ON OUR PROJECT



SEARCHLIGHT BEAMS ON THE CUSTOM HOUSE AS GUESTS ARE ENTERTAINED INSIDE

[VIEW MORE PICTURES ONLINE](#)

ANOTHER PART OF OUR PROMISE FULFILLED

With the permission of Ramsgate Town Council, we recently held a reception in the beautifully refurbished Custom House for local councillors, tourist agencies, community groups and business contacts. The purpose of the evening was to ensure our project is properly co-ordinated and aligned with other local initiatives and to shed some light on our ongoing plans.

The theme running through the event and the invites sent out earlier in October was the 1940's, an era which left such a mark on this town and across Europe. With a searchlight in the Harbour Yard and a Military Policeman on guard duty at the door surrounded by sand bags, guests were greeted with a warm welcome. A special 'Blitz' beer, very kindly donated by local brewery Gadd's was offered, and a selection of wines were served by local re-enactment group Bygone Days. David Comiskey's catering team supplied and served a range of delicious canapes.

The Refreshment Rooms were converted into a mini museum for the evening, laid out with artefacts and memorabilia, rivalling many of its professional counterparts. The Mobile Tunnel Exhibit made its debut and took pride of place. It was fitted out with an assembled bunk bed, table and a reconstructed bench similar to those

photographed in the tunnels when they were used as air raid shelters during WWII.

A pleasant evening perusing the articles and viewing the Tunnel Exhibit was broken suddenly by the sound of planes hammering overhead and the wail of an Air Raid Siren sounding in the foyer. Guests were ushered upstairs to 'safety' to the main Council Chamber.

David Green, Chairman of our Group, and Town Mayor, kicked off proceedings with a welcome to the guests. Clive Holland then gave his presentation detailing the project and how it would contribute to the regeneration of Thanet's tourism industry. Stephen Davies was next up to the podium and showed a short film with recordings of the people he has been interviewing for our Oral History Project. Peter Borough then took our guests through the financial situation and survey updates before Rick Houghton showed what possibilities modern technology could help us achieve in our final design of the attraction.

The feedback for the evening as our guests departed was enthusiastic, extremely positive and complimentary. The team went home confident and buoyed the project would receive support from many of those who attended and from other sectors of the community. We are now planning a public meeting for early in the New Year to report on our progress. To keep up to date with what we are doing, check out our website.



'HOCKNEY' STYLE PANORAMA OF THE FULL EXHIBIT IN THE REFRESHMENT ROOMS

CHRISTMAS COMPETITION

WIN A CASE OF BLITZ BEERS IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS



Just answer this simple question:
What date in August 1940 was the Ramsgate 'Blitz?'

TO ENTER:-

Contact us with your answer by post or email, leaving your name and contact number. Entries must be received by Wednesday the 21st of December. The winner will be drawn from all correct answers by the Mayor of Ramsgate. Winner will receive their case of 'Blitz' beer on Friday the 23rd of December.

Email: blitz@ramsgatetunnels.org
Post: Blitz Beer Comp, Ramsgate Tunnels, Custom House, Harbour Parade, Ramsgate, CT11 8LP

'Blitz Beer' kindly bottled and donated by the lovely people at GADD'S brewery Ramsgate.
Many thanks to Eddie Gadd & company

RAMBLE ROUND RAMSGATE THIS CHRISTMAS

Walk off the Turkey and Christmas Pud this year with the Ramsgate Tunnels Ramble Round Ramsgate. We are plotting a route to take in the various Air Raid Shelter locations and entrances around town. We'll be organising 'pick up' points, near pubs of course, and the walk shouldn't be more than 2-3 miles. We look forward to seeing you there, no matter what's falling from the skies.

POSSIBLE RAMBLE DATE - MONDAY 26th Dec.
CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE ON DECEMBER 20th FOR CONFIRMATION DETAILS.



TUNNEL TALES: WHERE WE SHARE A STORY OF THE TUNNELS IN ACTION

Prime Minister Churchill visits after the 'Blitz'

BIG CHANGES FOLLOW CHURCHILL'S VISIT

The Ramsgate tunnels were formally opened by the Duke of Kent on the first of June 1939. In just over a years time they would prove their worth in saving the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of the towns inhabitants.

On August 24th 1940 Ramsgate became the first town in England to be blitzed. As a cloud of German bombers flew overhead toward London, an armed trawler just off the coast shot down the leading Luftwaffe aircraft. Possibly in revenge, the bombers circled the town and dropped over 500 bombs in less than five minutes. The enormity of the raid left devastation across the whole area, destroying the gas works on Boundary Road as well as hundreds of homes and businesses. Many thousands of residents owed their lives to the towns new shelters, though not all survived the attack. Nearly 30 people perished in the bombing, with over 50 injured or hospitalised.

News of this savage attack spread quickly and the Ramsgate Tunnels gained fame around the world. American journalist Hubert Knickerbocker described the attack as the 'worst raid in history'. The expression 'Hell Fire Corner' is generally associated with the South East of England, but the name grew from this Blitz on Ramsgate.



CHURCHILL SURVEYS THE DEVASTATION AROUND THE TOWN

As a result of all the publicity many famous people came to visit the tunnels out of interest and curiosity. Perhaps the most famous of these was Prime Minister Winston Churchill. He came to the town shortly after the attack to view the bomb damage himself. While being escorted around town by Mayor A.B.C. Kempe, sirens sounded the red alert. PM Churchill was escorted to the nearby shelter

entrance at Queens Street, swapping his famous John Bull Hat for a steel helmet and lighting one of his famous cigars. As they neared the shelter the Mayor pointed out to the PM that smoking was not permitted. "All right" replied the PM. Apparently there was quite a commotion as, with a wry smile he threw it away, saying, "There goes a good one." Everyone dived for the souvenir but the Mayor said afterwards, "Many people had a small piece, for that was all there was left". The Prime Minister complimented the town residents on how they had behaved during the Blitz, and it appears his visit left a lasting impression on him.



THE PRIME MINISTER AND MAYOR MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE SHELTER

Many British home owners didn't have insurance and many insured home owners found their cover did not include bombing or bomb damage. In his book 'The Second World War', Churchill describes being in Ramsgate and sheltering in the tunnels during an air raid. When he emerged he surveyed the damage. A small hotel had been reduced to a 'litter of crockery, utensils and splintered furniture'. He recounted how the proprietor, his wife and staff were in tears. What were they to do? He writes in his book of the War "Here is a privilege of power. I formed an immediate resolve. On the way back on my train I dictated a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kingsley Wood, laying down the principle that all damage from the fire of the enemy must be a charge upon the state and compensation be paid in full and at once. Thus the burden would not fall on those whose homes or business premises were hit, but would be borne evenly on the shoulders of the nation". August 24th is a day that changed many things, not just in Ramsgate, but across the nation, thanks to Prime Minister Churchill.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING PETER?

YOUR MONTHLY UPDATE

Progress has been steady during the month since the last issue of Tunnel Times. We have now received tenders from three professional organisations in response to the specification for a health and safety survey which we issued. We are in discussions with one of them with a view to starting work in the New Year.

The Health and Safety Survey is very important as it will determine if any substantial work is needed to improve the ventilation of the tunnels, remove hazardous substances or control the ingress of liquids. The work will be carried out in a progressive manner to provide the optimum return on the substantial investment that this survey represents. The first stage will be to eliminate areas where no problems are detected and then to concentrate the testing and investigations in any areas where traces of contamination are found. We are hoping there will not be too many of those.

The team continues its discussions with the Building Research Establishment in Watford (Not Walford as mentioned in last month's edition) on determining how we can best deal with fire precautions in our designs for the use of the tunnels by the general public. This is a complex subject which needs to be continuously kept in mind as the project plans proceed.

To get in touch with Peter email - p.borough@ramsgatetunnels.org



PETER BOROUGH
PROJECT MANAGER

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND THANK YOU

It took a lot of time, effort and patience to put on, move, construct and practice for our evening. Many played their part behind the scenes donating time, storage and their expert tea making skills. The committee would like to say a special thank you to those who helped out in numerous ways: The RNLI shop at Custom House for storage during the evening; Mrs Dot Spain for supplying furnishings and materials for the tunnel exhibit; John Pearce of the Ramsgate Motor Company for use of his garage space while constructing the tunnel, and lovely cups of tea; Peter, for the loan of his flat bed truck to move said tunnel; Phil Spain's family for the sand bag work gang; David and his staff at the Custom House; Mike Taylor and the Bygone Days re-enactment group; Bill Hooker and his wife for the Searchlight Truck; Eileen Richford at the Town Council for various helpful items and things; And especially to Keith & Phil for constructing the Tunnel, Peter Borough for the endless hours of editing and meetings he had to chair, and those who put together & took part in a wonderful presentation.

If you or your business would like further copies of the Tunnel Times please contact us at - ttcopies@ramsgatetunnels.org

If your business, office, establishment, shop etc would be able to help distribute the Tunnel Times, contact- ttcopies@ramsgatetunnels.org

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

We are a collective group of volunteers from various backgrounds, cultures and experience. It is our aim to survey, promote and design an attraction in Ramsgate to rival any in the South East.

MERRY CHRISTMAS



The Ramsgate Tunnels Heritage Group would like to wish you a Merry Christmas and a very prosperous New Year