



Margate in the Georgian Era

Pleasures and Pursuits in a Seaside Town

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Margate in the Georgian Era: Pleasures and Pursuits in a Seaside Town
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Cover Image: Margate Races 1788. Watercolour by John Nixon.

Title page image: detail from "Margate Pier", drawn and engraved by W. H. Timms, published by W. Garner, High Street, Margate, 1819.

Opposite page: A view from the Pier at Margate. Watercolour by George Keate, 1779.

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The Early History of Margate



1. Michiel van Overbeck. van Overbeck, a Dutch artist, was in England between 1663 and 1666 and produced the drawing of 'Marcoet' shown here. In the foreground a boat can be seen entering the creek at Margate, with buildings around the creek and on the slopes of the hill leading up to the Church, with a windmill on the horizon. [© Trustees of the British Museum]

The Georgian era, running from 1714 to 1830 and spanning the reigns of George I to George IV, was a time of great change for Britain as a whole and for its cities, towns and villages. For Margate the period was marked by a transformation from a small, rundown fishing village into a major holiday resort. Those living in the later Georgian period shared a sense of living in a revolutionary historical period; the decades around 1800 brought unparalleled transformation in Britain with the creation of a recognizably modern society. The period is synonymous with the industrial revolution, the rise of democracy and an unprecedented growth in population. These changes led to an increase in the number of ‘middling’ people – masters, craftsmen, shopkeepers, legal men and clerks. These middling people had significant disposable incomes to spend on a whole range of goods, services and pleasures, one of which was a holiday.

Prior to the eighteenth century a holiday might mean a day taken off work to mark a religious festival or a visit to the country for a few days to stay with friends or relations. Only in the eighteenth century did it become common for large numbers of people to travel from their homes to come together in another place for several weeks, solely for enjoyment. If the idea of spending time and money on enjoyment seemed too frivolous, it was always possible to visit a spa to take the waters, and pretend the holiday was to improve your health. At a spa town like Bath you could drink spa water and bathe in hot or cold water baths, but even if you were really ill this would take up only a small part of the day. Visitors needed ways to fill the empty hours of a workless day, and there were always local entrepreneurs keen to provide assemblies, circulating libraries, theatres and concerts, where the visitors could meet and be relieved of their money.

The boom in consumer spending in the Georgian era, linked to improvements in communications, led to the establishment of a number of new spa towns to supplement older towns such as Bath and Tunbridge Wells. One of these new spas was Scarborough, established in the 1720’s to serve the northern gentry. The mineral springs that were the *raison d’être* of the spa were down on the beach and it must have occurred to many that ‘sea water is in fact a *mineral water* to all intents and purposes.’¹ Indeed, Dr Robert Wittie, the author of *Scarborough Spa*, had suggested bathing in the sea as a remedy for gout as early as 1667, and Floyer’s *An Enquiry into the Right Use and Abuses of the Hot, Cold and Temperate Bath in England*, published in 1697, did much to advertise the efficacy of cold bathing. Celia Fiennes, who visited Scarborough in 1697, described what she saw:² ‘On this Sand by the Seashore is y^e Spaw [Spa] well w^{ch} people

Margate Hoy

The famous Margate hoys were one-masted sailing ships of cutter-rigged design that took anything between ten and seventy two hours on the journey between London and Margate, depending on wind, tide and weather. Originally designed to carry corn from Margate and other Kentish ports to London, by the early eighteenth century they had been “decked-in”, an obvious improvement on the earlier open hold, and become larger, reaching 60 tons by the 1720s.³⁴ The hoys would frequently carry passengers as well as corn and other freight and, as the importance of the passenger traffic grew, were fitted up with proper cabins and beds. These improved hoys, dedicated to passenger traffic, were referred to as yachts, cutters or packets.

By 1776 there were ‘five hoys, which sail in alternate weeks to and from London; they are vessels of 80 or 100 tons burthen; their station in the Thames is at Wool-quay, near the Custom-House: passengers pay only 2s. 6d. for themselves, and for their baggage, 6d. per hundred weight: Beside these sloops, a yacht has been fitted up, for the conveyance of passengers at the same moderate price; with the favourable concurrence of the wind and tide, the passage is often made in ten hours; a hoy from this place has not been lost for 150 years past; the Masters are civil, decent and careful men.’¹⁷

By 1809 it could be reported that the ‘The Passage Boats are fitted up with different cabins and beds in the most commodious manner, for the reception of passengers, baggage, and other lading, and sail daily about an hour before high water, to and from Dice and Ralph’s Quay, Billingsgate, during the season. It is said the number of persons carried to and from Margate in these vessels yearly, amounts, upon a moderate calculation, to 20,000 on an average. The number of these packets was generally eight or nine, but in the season of 1803, no less than eleven were employed during the summer months; and the passage is frequently made in eight or nine hours . . . Some of them have a state-room or after-cabin, which may be engaged by a select party for five or six guineas; but the passenger is conveyed in all of them at the moderate expence of 7s. and 9s. and his baggage proportionably cheap. It is perhaps owing to this, and the very superior accommodation which they afford, as well as to the civility and attention of the masters and seamen who navigate them, that Margate stands so highly distinguished in the list of watering-places. Exclusive of these vessels, there are three corn hoys, which sail alternately from Chester’s and Ralph’s Quays, near the Custom-House, on Saturdays, and carry goods and passengers.’³⁵

10. (Right) Undated etching: Margate Hoy (centre) with Dover and Calais passage boat (left) and Custom house cutter (right).



The Robert and Jane Passage Packet

The Robert and Jane was a typical Margate Hoy fitted up for the passenger trade to and from London. It was advertised on flyers such as that shown here and was also advertised in the London papers.

Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser: June 25, 1785.³⁶

Margate Passage Cutter

The Robert and Jane being fitted up in a very commodious manner for the reception of passengers, Robert Kidd, master, intends sailing during the Summer season, every Monday from Margate, and every Thursday from Wool Key, near the Custom house, London, when the favours of the public will be most gratefully acknowledged, and every attention paid to the convenience and pleasure of such passengers as please to honour him with their company.

The Robert and Jane having two distinct cabins, any family, or select party, to the number of eleven, may be accommodated with the After cabin, for three guineas, by giving a week's notice to Mr Smith, wharfinger, at Wool Key, or to Mr Kidd, in Margate, or on board the vessel.

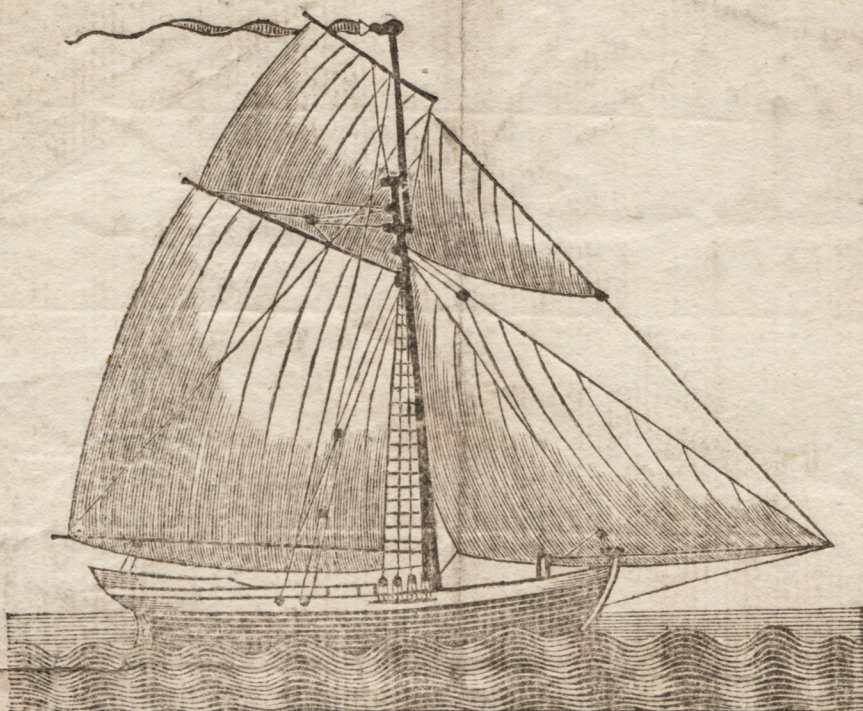
Single passengers for the said cabin, 6s. each; the Great Cabin, 3s. each.

N.B. All goods and parcels forwarded with the greatest care and dispatch, on the lowest terms.

By 1792, the Robert and Jane had three cabins: 'The Great Cabin, 5s. each passenger – has 16 beds, one bed, when numbers require it, may be possessed alternately by four persons, - The Middle Cabin, 7s. each passenger, has six beds, one bed, when numbers require it, may be possessed alternately by three persons – The After Cabin, has two beds, and may be hired by four persons, at 10s. 6d. each.'³⁷ It might have been the habit of sharing beds described in this advertisement that led to the unpleasant night experienced by 'A Rambler' on a Margate hoy: 'I lay down for a short time in a crib bed, but I was so besieged by an army of fleas, I went upon deck, and trudged sulkily the rest of the night.'³⁸

11. (Right) Undated flyer for
*The Robert and Jane Margate
Passage Packet.*

MARGATE PASSAGE PACKET.



The ROBERT and JANE, R. KIDD, MASTER,

Being fitted up in a very commodious Manner,

SAILS during the Summer Season, with Passengers and Baggage, from MARGATE every Monday, and from DICE KEY, near Billingsgate, London, every Thursday.

The GREAT CABIN, 5s. each Passenger, has 16 Beds—One Bed, when Numbers require it, may be possess'd alternately by 4 Persons.

The MIDDLE CABIN, 7s. each Passenger, has 6 Beds—One Bed, when Numbers require it, may be possess'd alternately by 3 Persons.

The AFTER CABIN, has Two Beds, and may be hired by Four Persons, at 10s. 6d. each.

All Goods and Parcels forwarded with the greatest Care and Dispatch; but the Master will be answerable for those only delivered into his Care to pay Freight. Children in Arms, Half Price.

Passengers to pay Half Price when Places are taken.

⚡ Jewels, Plate and Money; will not be accounted for, unless paid as such.

Venus Steam Packet 1823

Steam packets to Margate were introduced in 1815, allowing the journey to Margate to be made in as little as eight hours. The introduction of the steam packets was opposed by the proprietors of the Margate hoys 'who have used their utmost endeavours to destroy the rising confidence placed in the former' but the passenger trade by hoys was essentially finished by 1820; by then there were five steam boats on the Margate route, with one or two sailing for London every day, and three sailing on Monday.²⁴ As well as being fast, on the steam ships 'the accommodations are excellent: music, cards, backgammon, chess, drafts, &c, are provided for the amusement of the passengers; in short, the boat, during a voyage, may be compared to a London coffee-house, and the noise of the engine to the rumbling of carriages over stone pavements. Every attention is paid to ladies: indeed, the most gratifying respect and civility are shown to all the passengers, by the captain, steward, and ship's company.'²⁴

The Venus steam packet shown here was launched in 1821 and was owned by the London and Margate Steam Packet Company. A passenger travelling to Margate on the Venus in August 1823 gave his impressions of the ship:

Embarked at the Tower Stairs . . . on board the Venus Steam Boat for Margate when Boiling & Smoking away at the rate of 12 or 14 miles an hour in the most agreeable style to the great delight of nearly 200 cockneys of all ages, sizes & sexes. She . . . arrived in 7 hours and a half at her destination. The Accommodation of this Vessel is superior to any Sailing Vessel I ever saw. Splendid cabins, Mahogany fittings, Horsehair sofas, Carpetted floors, tiers of Windows like the Ports of a Frigate, with Bars and Bar maids, kitchen & Cooks, Stewards & Waiters and all the suitable paraphernalia of Splendid Breakfasting & Dinnering Administer their comforts to as easy, lounging genteel and amalgamated a Conglomeration of Passengers as ever promenaded with measured steps to a Band of musicians between the Stem & Stern of a Vessel. A fine awning over the Deck was felt as a delicate & well merited Complement to the Complexions of the fair Part of the Cargo. . . Arrived at Margate 3.30 P.M. landed under the Supervision of all its Idlers.⁴⁴

14. (Right) Detail from Margate, with the Venus Steam Packet entering the Harbour. Painted by W. L. Huggins. Engraved by T. Sutherland. Pub. 5 April 1823.



Margate by Rowlandson 1792



This print, published in 1792, shows the old Pier in a bad state, protected by wooden piles, apparently before the Pier had been clad in stone. Two sailors in blue lean over the parapet, looking down on the beach where two visitors are standing next to small boats, talking to a sailor sitting in one of the boats. The two red-roofed buildings to the left of the picture are likely to be the warehouses shown in Lewis's Map of Margate, 1736 (Figs. 4 and 5). The tilt on the sailing ships in the harbour suggests that it is low tide with the ships resting on the muddy bottom of the harbour.

21. (Left) *Margate*, Pub. T. Rowlandson, March 1792.
22. (Right) detail.



Margate Pier 1823-1829



Margate Pier appears in many prints of the period. In September 1823 the town and pier were first lighted by gas, with 24 large gas lamps on the Pier,³³ shown clearly in the prints by Hunt and by William Daniell. These two prints also show the original lighthouse at the end of the pier, later to be replaced by a much larger and more ornate structure, the first stone of which was laid in May 1828.³⁴ The new lighthouse is shown in the process of construction in the cartoon from 'A Trip to Margate' by Paul Pry published in 1829.³⁵

36. (Left) *The Pier*, from 'A Trip to Margate' by Paul Pry [William Heath], London, 1829.

37. (Top right) *Margate Pier*, Engraved by George Hunt, Pub. by Hunt and Pyall, London, ca. 1823.

38. (Bottom right) *Pier at Margate*, Drawn and engraved by Willm. Daniell, Pub. by W. Daniell, London, Aug. 1, 1823.



Mitchener's Bathing Machines ca 1773

The illustration shows an advertising trade card of James Mitchener dating from about 1773. The card reads:

At Margate in the Isle of Thanet, Kent, is erected by
James Mitchener
Commodious Machines for Bathing in the Sea.
Where the Nobility, Gentry, & others who are pleased to Favour
him may depend on all possible Care with a proper Guide for the
Ladies & Himself for the Gentlemen, & their Favours thankfully
acknowledged by
Their most Obedient & humble Servant
James Mitchener

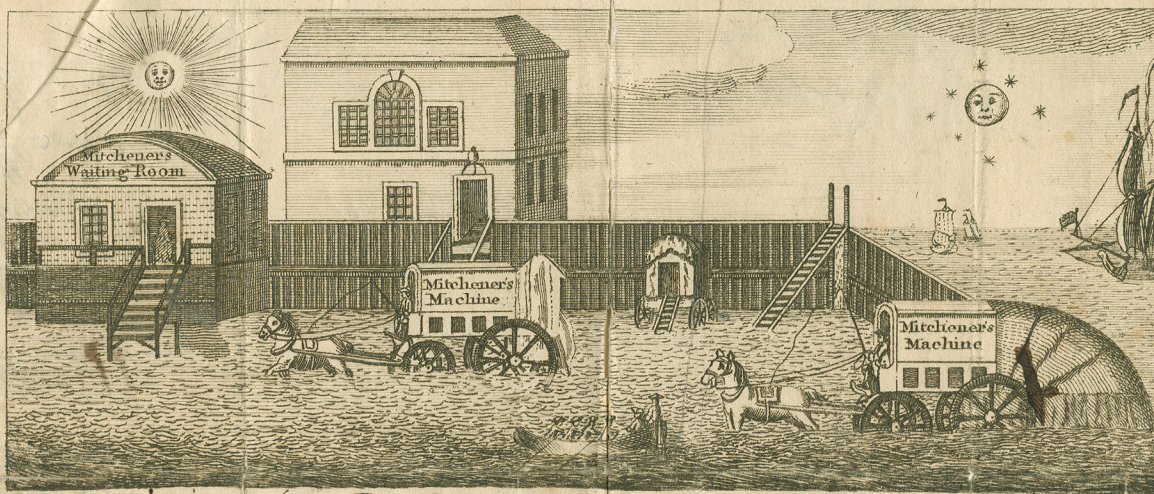
Another trade card of James Mitchener, in the British Museum, printed at Canterbury in 1773, reads: 'Bathing at Margate, James Mitchener, begs leave to acquaint his friends and the public in general, that he, being obliged to remove from the Parade, has now a large and commodious waiting-room adjoining Hall's circulating library.' Hall's original circulating library was located at the bottom of the High street, and the large building shown on the trade card illustrated here is likely to be the Hall's library. The card also shows 'Mitchener's machine' with two bathing machines with 'Mitchener's machine' painted on the sides. The numerous Masonic motifs on the card proclaim Mitchener's credentials to other masons.

The relationship between James Mitchener and John Mitchener the proprietor of the New Inn on Margate's Parade remains to be determined. John Baker, Solicitor-General of the Leeward Islands, visited Margate in 1773 and describes being bathed by Mitchener, but it is unclear which one:⁹

September 13. Up soon after 6; by help of Mitchener and Charles hobbled to bath at the very next door. Mitchener, vast stout man, dipt me (the celebrated Bet Row whom I saw not, is the woman's dipper here) —back and to bed near 2 hours . . . Dined on lamb chops and lobster, a fine one.

September 14. Bathed as yesterday. Mitchener says he is 55 - a stout, tall man that dips me —born at Petworth, so he must have been born in the year 1722.

51. (Right) Trade card
of James Mitchener.



At Margate in the Isle of Thanet, KENT. is Erected by

James Mitchener.

COMMODIOUS MACHINES for BATHING in the SEA.

Where the Nobility, Gentry, & others, who are pleased to favour him may depend on all possible Care with a proper Guide for the Ladies, & himself for the Gentlemen, & their Favours thankfully acknowledged by

Their most Obedient & humble Servant,

James Mitchener.



Setting out for Margate

67. (Top right). *Setting out for Margate.*

A mountainous woman, with traces of comeliness, sits squarely in an arm-chair, plying a fan, between her husband (left) and a servant who stands (right), his hat under his arm and his hands in his coat-pockets. The latter says: "An please you Master and Mississ, The Sailor Man has sent word as how the Wessel is ready to swim." The husband, a paunchy cit in old-fashioned dress, stands leaning towards his wife, saying, "Why my Dove — I am loaded with provisions like a tilt cart on a fair day, and my pockets stick out as if I was just return'd from a City Feast." The heads of two geese hang from his pocket. His wife says: "Dont be so Vulgar Mr Dripping — you are now among genteel folks, and must behave yourself — we shall want all the Wickalls on the Woyage depend upon it — bless me how Varm it is, I am all over in a muck."

68. (Bottom right). *A New made Knight and his Family Setting out for Margate.*

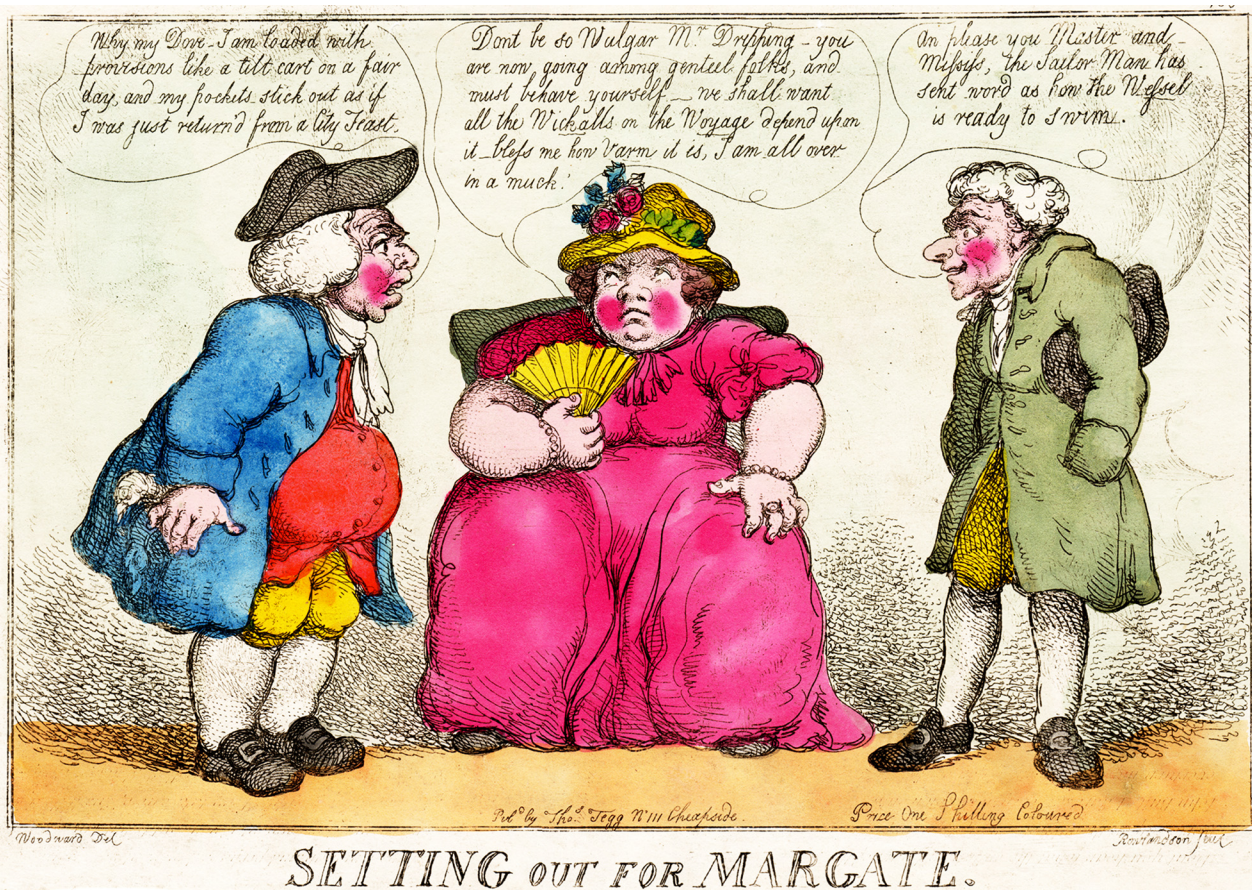
A nouveau riche family prepares for a journey to Margate. A manservant says: "Please your honours I have stowd little Master and Miss the Poll-Parrott and Brown Puppy in the Boot of the Carriage – there was no room inside." The wife (centre) says to her husband "What a way you have put on your cravat – now I desire you'll have none of your City vulgar manners – but behave as becomes the dignity of Sir Philip Fig!" The husband replies: "I don't know how it is my Lady – but somehow I can't get rightly into the way of it all the people fall a laughing."

To the left of the husband a man (his brother) is pointing to an 'Inventory of Necessaries for the Road: Rum, Wine, Brandy, Tobacco, Ale, Goose Pye, Ham, Chickens, Bread, Beer, Heart Cakes, Hollands, Peppermint Drops, Carroway Comfits. N.B. My Wifes best Wig in the little Trunk'. He is saying "Brother Sir Philip you have forgot the Backy Pipes".

A daughter is on the far right of the picture, and a son and another daughter are on the far left. His daughter on the right is talking to a soldier. The soldier is saying "Pon my consciences Miss Fig you will be the admiration of all Margate." She replies "Dear Captain Blarney you are pleased to flatter me!" The son says: "Now father is made a Knight – I'll astonish the Natives and let them see I can be as much the Tippy as any of them." The second sister replies: "Yes I think we shall make a little noise in the Town and I'm resolved to find out a Captain, as well as my Sister."

67. (Top right) Hand-coloured etching, by Thomas Rowlandson. Published by Thomas Tegg in 'The caricature magazine, or Hudibrastic mirror', Vol. 3, 29 August 1812.

68. (Bottom right) Etching, anonymous [no date ca 1810-1820].



The Fort II

The importance of the Fort increased dramatically in the years 1803 to 1805 that saw the greatest danger of invasion by the French. The *Times* reported in September 1804:¹¹

Our mode of defence for Margate, is by the batteries on the Fort Cliff, and the opposite Cliff, near the Sea-Bathing Infirmary, as well as from the Pier, by which means our little harbour is considered secure. Farther up, near Dandelion, the bay there is fortified by two batteries, one at each end to command it, and by fosses faced with masonry. . . . The gates towards the sea, on this island, are for the greater part stopped by breast-high walls, and those which are for convenience still left open, could be closed in an hour's time. The same may be said of the passages left, where fosses have been dug. The farmers' men are instructed in the readiest mode of their becoming a sort of petty, but useful engineers.

In October it was reported that 'The patriotic zeal of the town has supplied, for the public defence, a battery consisting of six pieces of artillery, one an 18-pounder, and five 24-pounders. These . . . are upon the heights commanding the Road and the Harbour of Margate. The volunteers appertaining to this establishment consist of sixty-three individuals, under the command of Captain Cobb, an opulent Banker, of this place.'¹²

At the same time it was being proposed that the Fort be made more accessible to visitors:¹³

It has been suggested, that it would be highly creditable to this watering place, to lay out some spot adjacent as a public walk, with some degree of taste. Weymouth has its Esplanade, Brighton its Sterne, . . . while Margate has only her present short and incommoded walk on the pier. The Fort Cliff might, at a trifling expense, be made perfectly easy of access, and a promenade might be formed upon it, which would yield to none in its command of marine scenery, and its consequent advantages of the cooling breezes from the sea.

The watercolour shown here, dated 1809, shows three guns on the Fort, mounted on raised earth mounds, with a red-coated soldier in attendance.

79. (Top right) Watercolour:
artist unknown, dated 1809.
80. (Bottom right) Detail.



Hall's Library 1789

Joseph Hall combined the businesses of librarian, bookseller, stationer, wine merchant, postmaster, property owner, and shipping agent, before going bankrupt in 1795.³⁰ He opened his first library on the Parade in 1766³¹ but then built a new library on the corner of Hawley Square which opened in 1787.³² The library was taken over by a Mr Were³³ in 1795.³⁴ The library was described as follows:¹⁰

Were's Library is situated at the north-west corner of Hawley Square, and commands a view of Cecil street and the above-mentioned square. It was erected a few years since by Mr Joseph Hall, long known to the vistsants of Margate as a Librarian and Post-master. It is a spacious fabric, the internal design and execution of which do credit to a native architect. It consists of an excellent shop and library, forming together a square of forty-two feet, of a proportional height, with a spacious dome in the front department, giving light and ornament to the whole structure; from the centre of which is suspended a beautiful glass chandelier. The shop contains an excellent assortment of stationary, jewellery, cutlery, hardware, silver and plated goods, &c. Nearly across the centre of the room is a range of Corinthian columns, which not only support the roof, but are designed to separate the shop from the library. On the cornice of each of the book-cases are busts of the poets. The side-walls and ceiling are most richly ornamented with figures and flowers; as is the chimney-piece with the nine muses, in *Thorp's* patent composition. Over the fire-place is a fine reproduction of Minerva; and in the different compartments are other figures well executed.

The library contains a choice selection of several thousand volumes, the reading of which, together with the privilege of walking the room, the use of newspapers and other periodical publications, are on very reasonable terms. The assemblage at the Libraries during the season, especially in the evening, is very grand; and must be peculiarly pleasing to a contemplative mind, who beholds in it an association of all orders and degrees, where every idea of precedence appears to be thrown aside.

The raffles, or as they are more politely called, the *subscriptions*, are generally for some article of jewellery, Tunbridge ware, toys, muslins, &c. and are so numerous that many goods are disposed of in an evening by this means.

91. (Right) Detail from
Hall's Library at Margate.
Published June 4 1789, by J.
Hall at Margate and J. Mal-
ton, No.6 Conduit Street,
Hanover Square.



Marine Parade 1820

The Parade was one of the most popular walks in Margate: it was usual to go for a walk after bathing and ‘the places most frequented for this purpose are the Parade, the Fort, and the Rope Walk. When the tide is ebbd, many persons go on the sands...’¹⁷ Nevertheless the Parade was initially rather unsavoury. A letter in the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* in 1773 paints an unfavourable picture of both the harbour and the Parade:¹⁸

The conveniences for bathing here are clever, but the sea intolerable, no other place but the harbour being allotted for it; and, considering the return of the tide therein, it cannot be wondered that much filth, coming from the vessels, horses, and carriages, must not only corrupt the water, but render it unpleasant to those who, at all events, will bathe; and many there are thus resolute. Here is also a quay, by some called a Parade; but this is undoubtedly a misnomer, except it be taken from the parade of making out bills at a tavern thereon, where, on the third day after my arrival, I and two friends dined from a small saddle of mutton, and a bottle of Port, for which we paid £1 3s. 8d.

George Carey, in 1799, was also deeply unimpressed:¹⁰

What the old Parade might have been is no easy matter to tell, but in its present state, and in this improving age, it has little to boast of in respect to elegance, or even cleanliness, and in rainy weather it is a mere swamp; the greatest part of it lies between a noisy stable-yard, well furnished with manure, and the common sewer of the contiguous market-place, as well as all the lower part of the old town, which frequently yield up the most ungrateful exhalations and unsavoury smells to those who choose to regale themselves in this delicious neighbourhood.

Gradually, however, things did improve. The original wooden jetties running from Garner’s Library to the Pier were replaced with stone; we read that, in 1802, the ‘first stone of proposed new Stone Jetty, along the Marine parade, was laid – by Francis Cobb, the son and successor of the late worthy Deputy’¹⁹ and that in 1826 ‘the Parade is making wider for a carriage road to the Pier from High street, the streets also are Macadamizing and nearly completed.’²⁰

122. (Top right) Light house and Pier, from Oulton ‘Picture of Margate’ 1820.

123. (Bottom right) Marine Parade and Harbour, from Oulton ‘Picture of Margate’ 1820.

