

**WRITING THE ISLE:  
KENT'S ISLE OF THANET IN THE PAGES OF GREAT AUTHORS  
Locally associated literary history by Richard Lewis**

From Chapter One – **FIRST PAGES**

**Jane Austen** (1775 – 1817) was well aware of the danger Thanet posed to polite society. Ramsgate and Margate were by now fashionable seaside resorts in her day, and Austen cast her all-seeing eye on Ramsgate in 1803 when she came on a visit. Her much-loved brother Francis was posted to Ramsgate to lead a company called the 'Sea Fencibles' for the Royal Navy in case of Napoleonic invasion, and had become engaged to local girl Mary Gibson. Eager to meet her future sister-in-law, Austen duly descended on Ramsgate.

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Austen's view of Ramsgate would come in her novels *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Mansfield Park* (1814). She loved the sea, but implies a hazard warning in her portrayal of Ramsgate. For her narrative in *Pride and Prejudice* she must choose a town to which that fortune-hunter and seducer of innocence, George Wickham, manoeuvres Fitzwilliam Darcy's fifteen-year-old sister Georgiana for his planned elopement. Naturally enough the distant, socially dubious and morally suspect Ramsgate is for her the obvious choice.....

From *Pride and Prejudice* (1813):

I must now mention a circumstance which I would wish to forget myself, and which no obligation less than the present should induce me to unfold to any human being. Having said thus much, I feel no doubt of your secrecy. My sister, who is more than ten years my junior, was left to the guardianship of my mother's nephew, Colonel Fitzwilliam, and myself. About a year ago, she was taken from school, and an establishment formed for her in London; and last summer she went with the lady who presided over it, to Ramsgate.....

From Chapter Twelve – **BONDLAND**

**Ian Fleming** (1908 – 1964) had so many connections with Kent that the Isle of Thanet would inevitably flash through his highly-charged writing at some point. Fleming loved to drive down to Sandwich from London to play golf at the Royal St George's Golf Club, where he was a committee member, and in one of his best known stories, *Goldfinger*, this golfing interest translated itself into a classic match between James Bond and the villain Auric Goldfinger in Sandwich at the club Fleming renames as the Royal St Marks. In this novel Bond stays at a hotel in Ramsgate before heading on to Sandwich: clearly Fleming's knowledge of the south coast of Kent came in very handy for his storytelling.

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In the *Goldfinger* story we now find Bond motoring down to Goldfinger's base at Reculver, on the Thanet border, then on to Ramsgate and finally Sandwich. En route, he indulges in an outrageous

piece of driving by powering past a car that is holding him up on the inside. Another glorious, if totally reprehensible, piece of wish fulfilment.

From *Goldfinger* (1959):

Another five miles and Bond was through the dainty teleworld of Herne Bay. The howl of Manston sounded away on his right. A flight of three Super Sabres came in to land. They skimmed below his right-hand horizon as if they were diving into the earth. With half his mind, Bond heard the roar of their jets catch up with them as they landed and taxied in to the hangars. He came up with a crossroads.....

### From Chapter Thirteen – **THIS ISLE, THIS ENGLAND**

There is something so beautifully English about **Sir John Betjeman CBE** (1906 – 1984), a writer and poet who radiates an enthusiasm for English landscape, architecture and so many everyday details of the English way of life that perhaps only someone whose family came to England from another country could feel in such abundance.....

During the Second World War, Betjeman worked for the films division of the Ministry of Information, also becoming British press attaché in neutral Dublin, Ireland, a post in which he is remembered as having acquitted himself well. And of course it was during the war years that he wrote his poem, *Margate 1940*, a poem that expressed through its evocation of the Isle's probably best-known seaside resort the very Englishness of England, and everything that was worth fighting for in those uncertain times.

*Margate 1940:*

From out The Queen's Highcliffe for weeks at a stretch  
I watched how the mower evaded the vetch,  
So that over the putting-course rashes were seen  
Of pink and of yellow among the burnt green.

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