



Stone tools and other evidence show that our ancestors were in the Maidstone area at least 400,000 years ago. Maidstone history really begins in the Medieval period, when the Archbishop's Palace overlooking the River Medway became the focus of small scale development probably including a market and fairs.

Maidstone was recognised as a town in 1549 when it was granted the royal charter, a recognition which it was to lose five years later for its part in the Wyatt Rebellion (and regain and lose several more times). At this time the population was around 2,000.

By the 18th Century, Maidstone was the official and legal centre of Kent, and a successful industrial town, with major brewing and paper-making industries. Maidstone entertainment was viewed as the rural alternative to London's West End.

The 21st Century sees Maidstone expanding as a retail centre, still the administrative centre of Kent, and developing its social side, particularly for youth with its bar society.

VICTORIAN MAIDSTONE - Working Life

The Brewing Industry

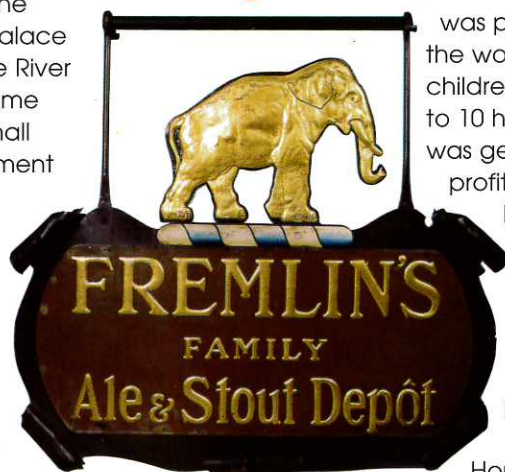
Brewers in general had a reputation as good employers, and often provided clothing, housing and quantities of beer to drink at work. Most work was seasonal, related to harvest times, and involved long hours for low wages. It was not until 1847 that a law

was passed limiting the women's and children's working day to 10 hours. Brewing was generally profitable, and

Brewery owners soon became involved in local high society and politics.

Hop flowers, dried in oast houses, give flavour to beer. Hop bines are grown on wires fixed 4-5 metres high between wooden poles, and cut down for picking. It was hard work - from dawn to dusk, and picking turned fingers black.

In 1838 a family of five could earn 7 to 10 shillings a day. 1 shilling = 5p in today's money.



MAIDSTONE FASCINATING FACTS

In 1932 the author George Orwell spent a week hop-picking at a farm near Maidstone and wrote that he was so cold in his hut that he had to steal some pokes (hop sacks). He earned 9 shillings in a week.

The last hanging at Penenden Heath was of a young man for arson, years later someone else confessed on his deathbed to the crime.

In the 18th century prisoners were held in the cells above the Town Hall, and some were deported from here to Australia. Graffiti in these cells includes 'N.BROOMFIELD. CURED AND GONE TO BOTANY BAY.' and 'JOHN DAVIS, 3 TIMES HERE TO PLEASE HIS WIFE AND SCOTT'

William Shipley, founder of the internationally respected Royal Society for the Arts, was a Maidstone man and is buried at All Saints Church. He began with the Maidstone Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 - Brewing artefacts
- 2 - Fremlin's Brewery sign
- 3 - Magic lantern slide
- 4 - Maskell's of Maidstone mineral water bottle and Lyle's lemonade bottle
- 5 - Hop pickers



MAIDSTONE
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MAIDSTONE FASCINATING FACTS

Grant's Morella Cherry Brandy - viewed as one of the finest in the World, was made in Hart Street, Maidstone from 1853; it was used for its 'medicinal virtues' at London hospitals.

Maidstone's coat of arms is supported by the Maidstone iguanodon - the first time in the history of heraldry that a dinosaur has been used.

Maidstone Athletic Ground - home of 'The Stones' - opened on London Road in 1895. As well as football; cricket and athletics, and later rugby, greyhound racing, motor cycle racing and tennis were enjoyed here.

Sharp's toffees opened in Maidstone in 1876, it started from a Week Street grocery shop. Now run by Trebor Bassett, the smell of toffee mints is still part of the atmosphere of the town.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 - Shop on Week Street, Maidstone. About 1890
- 2 - Sharp's toffee artefacts
- 3 - Trolley Bus
- 4 - Watches by William Burch of Maidstone, 19th Century
- 5 - Cricketing artefacts, including balls made at Readers of Teston

In 1848 the first Health Act allowed local councils to charge rates, so they could afford to provide clean drinking water, underground sewers, and people to clean the streets. Maidstone still suffered 132 deaths in a typhoid epidemic in 1897, with emergency hospitals set up to cater for the 1,847 cases.



VICTORIAN MAIDSTONE - Home Life

In Victorian (1837-1901) Maidstone a huge number of terraced houses were built to create sanitary housing for the workers moving from the country to the expanding town industries. Census reports of the day show that often up to 8 or 10 people lived in some of these small, two-bedroomed houses.

Most houses were lit by candles and oil lamps, and cooking was done on solid-fuel ranges burning coal or logs. Real fires were the only way of heating rooms. In the 1870's, gas lights replaced oil lamps in the houses of the wealthy, and by 1881 a few houses even had electric lights.

Piped water and proper toilets were rare. Sewers emptied directly into the River Medway, from where untreated water was taken and piped to standpumps in the streets for domestic use.

For entertainment there was the theatre, music hall, Brenchley Gardens, sometimes a circus or fair, the Museum, cinema, pubs and live sports to watch (including ratting and cock-fighting). Day trips to the seaside were organised; and for the slightly better off, cycling. Societies to cater for all tastes were set-up.



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