

NEW LIFE

MARGATE'S creative residents are driving its regeneration. Local artist ANN CARRINGTON takes us on a walking tour of the newly thriving town.

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Like many daytrippers from London before me, I emerge from Margate's handsome Grade-II listed railway station (designed by Modernist architect Maxwell Fry) into a blast of daylight. Ann Carrington, local resident, artist and y guide for the day, is there to meet me. 'Look at the light!' she says, gesturing expansively towards the town and its crescent of beach. 'We're bathed in light reflected from the sea from three sides if the town. It's what originally drew Turner here'.

A WALK WITH TURNER AND HIS MISTRESS

JMW Turner is Margate's most famous guest: he visited throughout his life, lured by the skies, which he described as "the loveliest in all Europe", and which he interpreted in more than a hundred paintings. Turner's connection with the town is the pulse behind its regeneration: plans to construct the new Turner Contemporary Gallery, designed by architect David Chipperfield and costing £25 million, are underway with work due to be completed in 2010.

Ann and I stroll past the site (an old car park) and the visitors' centre, Droit House (which has a model and visualisations of the gallery), on our way to the Harbour Arm. This was once the centre of Margate's maritime activity and cradles the town's horseshoe-shaped bay.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The magical Shell Grotto; rummaging for treasure with Ron Scott; taking tea with Katie Welsford at the Mad Hatter café, where they are greeted in style by Peter Clements-Bullett



What was a collection of storage holds used by fishermen has been revamped to become a row of shops, restaurants and a gallery run by Isle of Thanet Arts (IOTA). Ann stops to talk to Fiona Sheriff, who, with partner Graham Knight, is developing the Harbour Arm. Ann and Fiona excitedly discuss the imminent arrival of one of Ann's sculptures - a bronze Shell Lady who'll grace a plinth next to the lighthouse.

'At the council, we see local creative people as a resource to drive the regeneration of *Margate*'

Ann's Shell Ladies – seven-foot tall crinolined figures made from shells that represent doughty women from the town's past – have popped up in surprising places over the last few months (and will be back again this summer), a result of an initiative by the council encouraging artists to participate in the town's regeneration. The permanent bronze figure is of Mrs Booth, Turner's landlady and mistress who, despite keeping him financially afloat for 18 years, was not mentioned in his will. 'I like the idea of Mrs Booth facing out to sea as if waiting for a lost husband, like the French Lieutenant's Woman,' Ann says. 'Her back is against what will be the Turner Contemporary Gallery, as if snubbing Turner for the insult of his will.' For more information, visit margateharbourarm.co.uk (01843 260260).

We turn away from the sea and Ann leads me through the tightly knotted Georgian streets of the old town – fast becoming the Creative Quarter as increasing numbers of studios, galleries and workspaces become established – towards one of the town's most famous attractions: the Shell Grotto. Unsurprisingly, given her works recent subject matter, Ann is a big fan of this underground labyrinth whose 70 feet of underground passages have been decorated with more than four million cockles, whelks, mussels and oysters. The Grotto and shell ornaments sold in tourist shops inspired Ann to create her own Shell Ladies. 'When I walk from my studio on Margate High Street to the seafront,' she says, 'I still see shell ornaments for sale.'