



TRANSFORMED BY WAR 1939 - 1945

Coastal communities respond to attack



Ramsgate's proximity to German airfields in France created high vulnerability to attack.

The preparedness of local efforts to provide shelter against attack was exceptional at Ramsgate and the surviving (and visitable) tunnels are one of many historic features of **Ramsgate Heritage Harbour**. As was later experienced in the London blitz, what had been intended as a temporary shelter became, despite official opposition, living space for those bombed out and the authorities were obliged to improve water and sanitation facilities to cope.



The main tunnel entrance of the Ramsgate Tunnels at the official reopening in 2014
Image: Ramsgate Tunnel Society



Image: Ramsgate Tunnel Society

Prime Minister, Winston Churchill visited Ramsgate on 28th August 1940. When the air raid sirens sounded, and he was ushered down the Queen Street entrance – but had to leave his cigar behind.

On 24th August 1940, two weeks before the raids on London began, Ramsgate was hit by more than 500 bombs from a squadron of German aircraft approaching Manston. 1,200 houses were destroyed or damaged, 29 civilians and 2 soldiers were killed, with 50 injured. Countless lives were saved by the deep shelter system conceived and implemented by the careful planning, forethought and persistence of the Mayor of Ramsgate, Arthur Kempe and the Borough Engineer Richard Brimmell and his team.

Opened on 1st June 1939, the shelter system was made up of three tunnels (the main one using a railway tunnel) with 11 entrances in use, all no further than 5 minutes away from the furthest house.

Over time the shelter system was furnished with canteens, first aid posts, an entertainment area and a hospital wing, as well family sleeping and living encampments.