

An Introduction

Maidstone and its surrounding area have a long and rich history. There is much to learn about the first settlers in the area and how its population changed over time. In this study, children will gain an understanding of how Maidstone became the place we know and love today.

What you need to know

The earliest evidence of a human presence in the Maidstone area comes from a range of stone tools found on the North Downs, dating back to the Palaeolithic era. A large woolly mammoth tooth was discovered in the town centre, suggesting that these Palaeolithic visitors had a reliable food source through hunting.

The surrounding area of Maidstone is home to several Neolithic sites, including Kit's Coty and Little Kit's Coty. This marks the first sign of people moving away from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, instead beginning to settle in the area and building monuments to their dead.

Evidence from the Bronze Age includes the notable Boughton Malherbe hoard, containing over 346 artefacts. Another key discovery was an Iron Age cemetery at Aylesford, finds from which are now in the British Museum. These finds provide solid evidence that Maidstone was becoming a hub of activity during this time.

When the Romans arrived, Britain changed forever. Although no concrete evidence of a settlement in Maidstone has been found, historians know that a Roman road ran through the area, connecting Rochester to Hastings. The remains of several large Roman villas have also been uncovered around Maidstone, the most notable being a 17-room villa near Maidstone East Station, featuring underfloor heating and farming facilities. Other Roman finds include coins, and, remarkably, much of Roman London, including its city walls, was built using Ragstone from the Maidstone area.

The earliest documented reference to Maidstone as a settlement appears in an Anglo-Saxon charter from 975, where the settlement is called Mægdan Stan, believed to translate as "the People's Stone" or "Maiden's Stone" possibly referring to one of the local Neolithic sites, with their huge stones.

With the arrival of the Normans, Odo of Bayeux, who was granted control of most of Kent, sought to expand his territory, causing conflicts. This led to the first recorded trial in English history, known as the Trial of Penenden Heath. Odo lost the case and was imprisoned for five years.

The town of Maidstone was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Meddestane. At that time, the town had around 54 households and



was an important settlement under the control of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The town thrived with productive farmlands, mills, and fisheries, making it a key location in Kent.

By the Medieval period, Maidstone had developed into a bustling market town. In 1261, it was granted the right to hold a weekly Thursday market, attracting traders from across Kent. Clothmaking became one of the town's most important trades, with local mills processing wool from nearby farms. The town's position on the River Medway connected it to London, enabling easy transport of goods.

Maidstone played a significant role during the English Civil War. In 1648, the Battle of Maidstone saw Royalists fight Parliamentary forces in the narrow streets near All Saints Church. Although the Royalists fought bravely, they were eventually defeated. This battle is an important part of Maidstone's history, and traces of the conflict can still be seen at All Saints Church today.

By the end of the Stuart period, Maidstone had grown significantly, benefiting from peaceful times and its thriving markets, particularly in livestock and hops, which were crucial to the town's economy.

During the Industrial Revolution, Maidstone became a key centre for papermaking and brewing. The town's mills, such as the famous Turkey Mill on the River Len, were pioneers in papermaking. James Whatman revolutionised the process, and his paper was used for important documents worldwide. Brewing also flourished, with Fremlin's Brewery on Earl Street becoming one of the largest in Kent. Although the brewery closed in 1967, its former site is now Fremlin Walk shopping centre. The arrival of the railway in 1844 further connected Maidstone to London, transforming its economy and transport system into the bustling town we know today.

During World War 1, Maidstone made significant contributions, particularly through the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment. By September 1914, just a month after the war began, 300 men from Maidstone and nearby areas had volunteered. These men fought in major battles such as the Western Front, Gallipoli, and Jerusalem. One of the regiment's heroes, Lieutenant Cecil H. Sewell, was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery during the Battle of Frenicourt in 1918, tragically losing his life while saving others.

On the home front, Maidstone's factories played a vital role in the war effort. Tilling-Stevens adapted to produce military vehicles and munitions, while E. Sharp and Sons pulped fruit to make jam for soldiers. Local women stepped up, working in these factories and taking on roles such as bus driving. Maidstone also cared for wounded soldiers in hospitals set up by the Voluntary Aid Detachment, including the Howard de Walden Institute.



In World War 2, Maidstone again faced challenges, particularly during air raids. The town was bombed during the Blitz, with one of the worst attacks occurring on the 27th of September 1940, known as Black Friday, when 22 people were killed. Another tragedy struck when a fighter plane crashed into houses on Albion Place, killing eight civilians.

Once again, Maidstone's factories, like Tilling-Stevens, supported the war effort by producing military vehicles. The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment was heavily involved, with soldiers fighting in places such as North Africa, Italy, and Burma. Today, Maidstone's war memorials, including the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment Cenotaph in Brenchley Gardens, serve as a reminder of the sacrifices made by local people in both world wars.

Resources

Our key enquiry questions, sources, PowerPoints, activities, and other resources will help to build children's understanding of their local area of Maidstone and answer the question 'How has Maidstone changed over time?'

Get in touch

Is there an area of local history you'd love to see on our Local History Hub?
Get in touch to learn how we can work together! Email

LocalHistory@tpet.co.uk
to find out more.



Teacher's Pet



Historic England



Maidstone

Local History

Historic England and Teacher's Pet have come together to bring you a collection of free resources that you can use in your local history teaching.



Historic England



Teacher's Pet

Who are Teacher's Pet?

Teacher's Pet have been providing downloadable and playable educational content to early years and primary school teachers for over 14 years. We cover all areas of the curriculum and use a team of in-house teachers and designers to create engaging and memorable concepts, that the children will love.

Why local history?

At [Teacher's Pet](#) we want to empower primary school teachers by giving them the tools they need to deliver inspiring and thoughtful lessons about the local area and its history. We believe local history teaching has such an important part to play in a child's wellbeing – helping to give children a sense of pride in where they live.

Our Local History project is designed to provide teachers across the UK with everything they need to successfully carry out a full scheme of teaching about their local area, through key enquiry questions and source led activities.

Working with [Historic England](#) gives us access to archived maps and photos for resources and information from knowledgeable local historians, as well helping us to provide the content to you free of charge.

For more information about our Local History project or to find out more about Teacher's Pet Classroom Resources, please visit our website.