

Nicolette Loizou

111 Places
in Canterbury
That You
Shouldn't Miss



emons:

Foreword

From the bell towers and sky-high cliffs right down to the depths of the London Clay marshlands, this part of Kent has a story everywhere. Reminders of England's past, its wars ancient and modern, industries rising and declining, are found across field, forest and shore.

There were once 52 pubs in Whitstable. Great days! A quiet fishing village reinvented as a foodie's delight, staying true to itself by giving a spirited 'no thanks' to the chains, Whitstable has welcomed Londoners for decades, sometimes referring to them as 'Down From Londoners', DFLs for short. But who can blame the capital's escapees? Growing up in Kent, it took time in London for me to appreciate the world I had left behind. I won't make this mistake again.

Herne Bay has transformed itself from sleepy outpost to a *costa* steeped in English eccentricity. Where else, I challenge you, can you find a bakery selling frog-shaped cakes, a broken pier and a flag-decorated army surplus shop? Grab your chips and make that windswept walk to mysterious Reculver. I have done this since I can remember and am now increasingly conscious of what it would be like if this – and our other fragile seaside treasures – were ever to disappear under the waves.

Canterbury's spookiness is hard to resist. Heads under beds, unexplained Roman bones, mysterious swords and bombed-out buildings are just some of the stories. Chaucer, Marlowe and Somerset Maugham weaved both evil and good into their fictional tales. But Canterbury is also a fun city, offering both wonky old buildings and modern ones filled with cartoon history. Even its natural landscape brings a smile with a comically bizarre tree and fruits destined for warming cider. Curio shops burst with antiques, sweet treats abound and it is also the forever home for Rupert the Bear and the adorable Bagpuss. And for me too.



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Layout: Eva Kraskes, based on a design

by Lübbecke | Naumann | Thoben

Maps: altancicek.design, www.altancicek.de

Basic cartographical information from Openstreetmap,

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Editing: Rosalind Horton

Printing and binding: Grafisches Centrum Cuno, Calbe

Printed in Germany 2022

ISBN 978-3-7408-0899-0

First edition

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15 The Crooked House

How low can you go?

No, it's not your eyes. This 17th-century house is indeed skewed. A popular theory for its lop-sidedness was once that a giant leant on it, but the real culprit is of course more prosaic: unsuccessful adjustments to the large internal chimney. The chimney collapsed in the 1980s, but the building was saved thanks to intervention by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust and the council. Because of the damage suffered, a new front door had to be built with extremely skewed corners to fit the door frame. Although the interior isn't as eye-catching as the outside, the low ceilings and ancient beams are worth a look too. A brick cellar too dangerous for the public to visit is rumoured to be a cavernous delight.

The large windows are thought to have been installed to maximize light for the city's weavers who would have once worked here creating fine silks and cottons. These talented émigrés from Belgium (Walloons) and France (Huguenots) settled in Canterbury in the 17th century to escape religious persecution at home. Canterbury was especially popular due to the commercial pull of the river and closeness to London, until the easy availability of East Indian silks began to take its toll on business. Mechanisation became the final threat and by 1837 demand was in inexorable decline.

Murder, piety and medieval intrigue are words more usually applied to the history of Canterbury, but such lopsided houses add a splash of comedy.

This one's peculiarity lends itself perfectly to creative establishments, and in the past it has served as a gallery and an instrument shop. Now it's Catching Lives Bookshop, featuring a wide range of second-hand paperbacks. The stock is all donated and the shop is run entirely by volunteers, so its proceeds can go towards the homeless so make a visit if you can. Try not to tip over as you pass through the door!



Address 28 Palace Street, CT1 2DZ, +44 (0)7899 458961, www.catchinglives.org/catching-lives-bookshop | **Getting there** 10-minute walk from Canterbury West station via St Peter's Street and the High Street before turning into Guildhall Street and then Palace Street; Canterbury West station car park | **Hours** Exterior unrestricted | **Tip** Crane your neck to make out the figure of a Native American at the apex of the building, created at a time when the new world was opening up.



19 European Peace Pavement

An artistic response to peace

Blinking at you on a sunny day is an unusual collection of public art, speaking quietly of unification and reconciliation. Lifting the spirits and making a welcome change from solemn war memorials are 16 individual stones made by artists set amongst a plain, unworked York paving stone.

In place since 1993, the Peace Pavement was developed when artists from 16 European cities including Canterbury, all of which had been bombed during the 20th century, were asked to create their own response to peace both as individuals and as artists. This artistic project celebrated the opening up of Europe, offering a new and exciting prospect for Eastern European artists who travelled from places such as St Petersburg and Vladimir. They worked in an old garage in Pound Lane, with some of the images being carved into the stone and some sandblasted. A place of wartime activity, Dane John Park was chosen, to showcase the work celebrating the opening of European borders. Landscaping was designed around the pavement and benches installed creating a peaceful and contemplative space just off the busy city centre. In fractured times it is a welcoming reminder of the sanctity of peace. Unfortunately suffering its own damage in the past years, it has been refurbished and cleaned earlier this decade to make it (hopefully) vandal-proof. The public art project has also influenced other artworks such as Martin John Callanan's sobering *Wars During My Lifetime*.

The Peace Pavement talks of links and ties with our overseas neighbours – once our enemies, and despite recent political upheaval, now our friends. It's interesting to note that the predominant feature of the park is a Romano-British burial mound from the 1st or 2nd century AD (see ch. 16). Perhaps climb to the top and survey your surroundings, considering the weight of history, and how much of it has been spent in war and conquest.



Address Dane John Gardens, CT1 2QX, www.explorekent.org | **Getting there** 15-minute walk from Canterbury West station through city centre before turning right at Fenwick; Whitefriars car park | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** Although it is a replica, the elegant Victorian-style bandstand in the park is worth a look. If you're visiting in the summer, there may be a concert on.

60 Amy Johnson Statue

An astonishing aviatrix, a mysterious end

This jaunty bronze statue created by Stephen Melton encapsulates the pioneering aviator at her peak. Complete with aviation gear and goggles she looks at ease, as she would have done when flying – the activity came so naturally to her.

The daughter of a Yorkshire fish exporter, Johnson made aviation history as the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia in 1930. Herne Bay's place in her story is not widely known, but the town was her last call before her fatal flight in 1941. Johnson's legacy as a heroine was cemented at the height of World War II when she bravely took off in dense fog in an Airspeed Oxford heading towards RAF Kidlington, near Oxford. When she veered off course and crashed into the Thames Estuary, severe weather conditions foiled all rescue attempts. Her body and aircraft have lain in freezing waters for more than eight long decades.

Diving enthusiasts based in Kent have taken up the challenge to discover the wreckage. Armed with witness reports, tide and weather charts for diving and photographs of the aircraft's structure the team are as prepared as they can possibly be. But it is not an easy task. The sediment in the waters means there is little or no light when trying to locate traces of the crash. Johnson was thought to have landed between two busy shipping lanes, and the traffic there will have disturbed the few clues thought to survive. Not only that, but the currents are unpredictable. Despite the discovery of the wreckage of a plane in 2003 in local waters, it was not thought to be the final resting place of Johnson, who keeps the secret of her tragic flight in her very watery grave.

Johnson's vigour and strong will is caught in the statue's gaze straight into the clouds. Female aviators remain rare today, as do statues of women. This lovely representation of a nation's heroine standing proud is a wonderful example of both.



Address Herne Bay promenade | **Getting there** 3-minute walk from Mortimer Street and then straight ahead to the promenade; Neptune car park | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** Nearby is a picnic bench in the design of a biplane also commemorating the aviator. A fun place for lunch, Jane Priston's eye-catching bench was designed as part of a local art project.