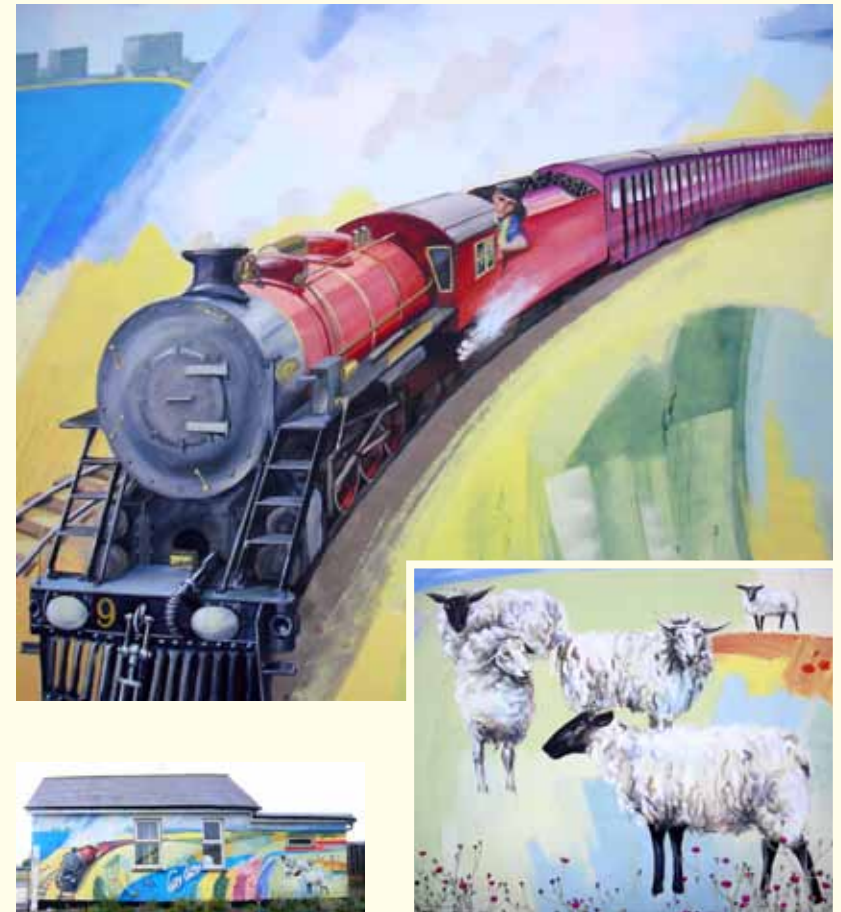


THE WALL PAINTINGS OF ROMNEY MARSH
Murals in New Romney



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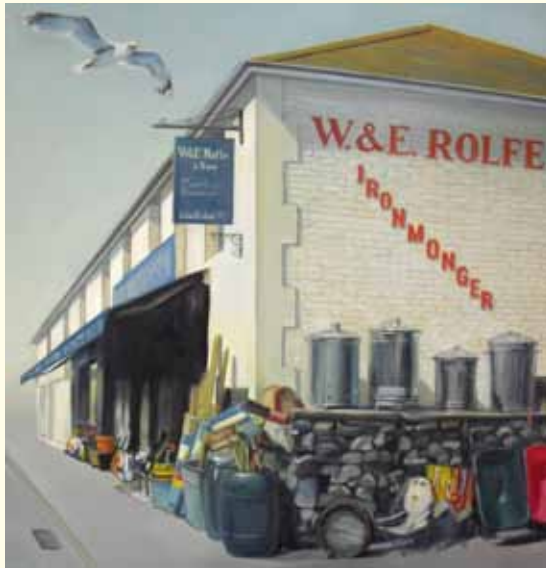




1. New Romney Railway Mural by Elena Priestley.

This was the first mural to be completed in 2010. The famous trains run through familiar Marsh landscape where well known points of interest can be seen including the power station and Fairfield Church. Notice the rather fiendish expressions on the sheep, the improbable blue of the dyke water and the clever impression of rapeseed and other arable fields. Have you spotted the tiny mouse? The frogs? The poppies? These two trains and others can be taken from the station going either Eastwards to Hythe or Westwards to Dungeness point and the lighthouses.

2. New Romney Town Mural by Sue Randle, Elena Priestley and Dee Taylor.



Each of the artists painted three of the more interesting shops and buildings of the town. Typically those chosen are of long standing. Sometimes they have passed through several generations of the same family. All of the ones shown are part of the life stream and intimate memory of long time town dwellers.

The point of painting them was to show, in renewed focus, those treasures that are perhaps every day ignored but that add something precious to our

location and make us feel proud of the place. The mural is a record of ongoing domestic and social history that also acts as a reminder to value what we have here.

An active engagement with the works will make us realise which artist painted which work. Who painted two pubs and a bookmaker? It has to be a man! And notice his rather severe colours and powerful blocks of paint in darkish shade as if he longs to go abstract and rather geometrical like Rothko.

Compare this to the light musical work of the lady artist where almost everything seems to sway as if about to dance and colours are as of a dream. The other lady artist brings a warm humanity even to stones.



3. Romney Perpendicular by Maria Priestley and Dee Taylor.

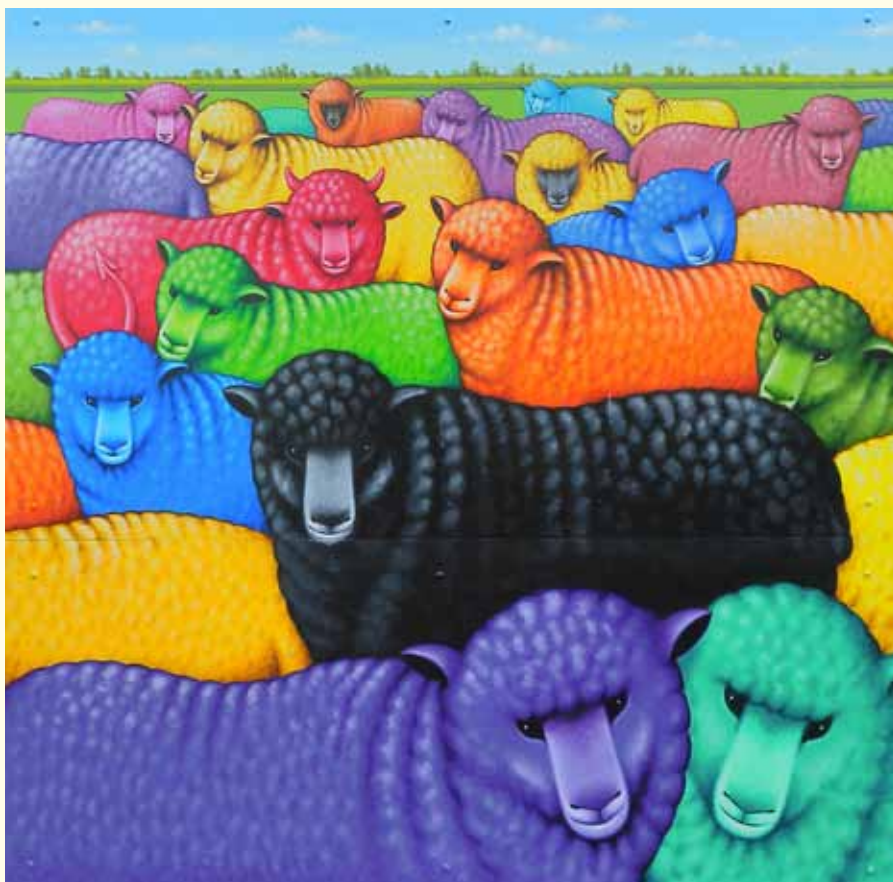
These five paintings are another tribute to the more significant buildings that grace the countryside hereabouts. The chosen towers attain a glory by stretching upward into the wide skies above their fellows of more modest construction, their height emphasised by the flatness of the land as far as the eye can see.

For the most part the towers are for civilian use but the Martello Towers were meant for war and they are thick and squat with a heavy, unexplained beauty like that of a bumble bee. In contrast the church tower and the water tower, one religious and one utilitarian, one built a thousand years ago one a hundred, have beauty of architectural design and decorative detail.



The pylons and windmills have grace and symmetry. They are modern in design and purpose with clean lines and a clear shape. They are highly engineered but remain discreet; reticent about their importance to power and only faintly threatening, like civil servants.

The light houses are special and endearing, particularly the older one. No one can forget their potential to save lives and their lonely duty, day in and day out, on the sparse terrain of Dungeness with its unusual vegetation at their feet.



4. Proverbial Sheep by James Marsh.

This painting is a shocker and has great comical effect. Playing on the fame of the Romney Marsh for a breed of sheep called Romneys and the large number of sheep to be seen in the area - two and a half for each member of the population - it also hints at the uses of the dyed wool. Another joke lies in the title proverb: There's a Black Sheep in Every Flock. Look closely; it actually refers to another, red, sheep. The humour invigorates this very skilfully produced work.

There's one more thing: if you look closely into the eyes of any of the individual sheep you will get a clear sense of their character. Not all of them are either as mild or as simple as the stereotype of a sheep may suggest. This could be a gang intending to take over the town!



5. Animural by Elena Priestley.

This cheerful and colourful work depicting many of the animals to be found on Romney Marsh was chosen to complement the site. It is on the side wall of the popular local Pet Shop. There are more than fifteen different species to be seen in the painting. Dog, cat, pheasant, rabbit, hare, fox, fish, frog, water vole, mouse, horse, badger, sheep, chickens and geese: can you spot anything else? The artist disguises a formidable skill in a popular, easily accessible format on the familiar background of the Marsh countryside. The paint used is mostly masonry emulsion from a normal hardware range.



6. Romney Armorial by Phillippa Goddard.

Mors Janua Vitae translates as Death is the Gateway to (everlasting) Life. These words and the varied forms in this painting are taken from tombs in the local church. They have been cleverly woven together into an abstract work that is one of the most distinguished on display in the town. The whole painting is harmonious with prominent special features such as birds and animal heads, leaves, stars and hints of the accoutrements of war. The colours are gorgeous but soft and in an unexpected combination, reflecting the artist's response to the quiet colours of the Marsh itself.

7. Romney Indigenous by Dee Taylor, Brian Oxley, Ken Fisher, Phil Gee, Elena Priestley, Terry Goddard and Victoria Fontaine-Wolf.



All the people shown here were born on Romney Marsh with the exception of two or three who merely lived and worked here for several decades. There is almost nobody local who sees the portraits who was not married to or divorced from one of the subjects, or is not a close blood relation or friend.

Nobody is named but all are widely known. Each person represents a different profession. There are hints as to the profession about the individual pictures. Can you spot the funeral director, the doctor, the policeman, the fireman, the lifeboat man and the bookie?

There are two pairs of parent and child and one brother and sister amongst the people represented. Are they apparent?

Seeing the variety of professions we might conclude that Romney Marsh could make a Unilateral Declaration of Independence and be quite all right. The Marsh has technically been an island since the completion of the Royal Military Canal to the North about two



hundred years ago so perhaps there is a case to be made. We could be another Channel Island and be a tax haven for the wealthy!

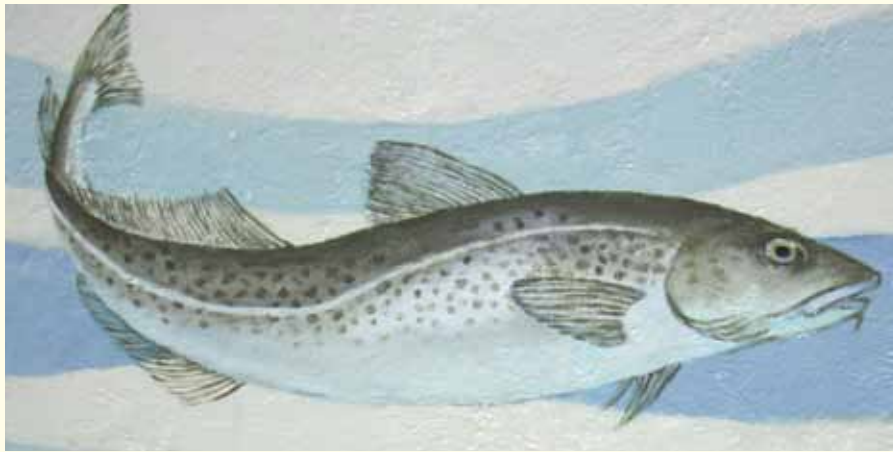
The portrait painters have different styles so although the format is the same it only takes a bit of careful examination to begin to identify who painted whom. Which artist is the most painterly, which the more romantic, which one whimsical, who the best draftsman, the best colourist, who portentous and who clear and workmanlike?



Murals in New Romney



- 1 New Romney Railway Mural 2010
- 2 New Romney Town Mural 2010
- 3 Romney Perpendicular 2010
- 4 Proverbial Sheep 2010
- 5 Animural 2011
- 6 Romney Armorial 2011
- 7 Romney Indigenous 2011
- 8 Romney Undersea 2011
- 9 Landscape Mural 2011
- 10 Country Fayre Parade 2011
- 11 Bishop Odo 2012
- 12 The Library Mural 2012
- 13 Flowers of Dungeness 2012
- 14 Romney Youth 2012



8. Romney Undersea by Victoria Fontaine-Wolf.

This work of light-hearted charm combined with anatomic accuracy is painted in restful pastel shades and has a curious perspective that conveys the idea of depth and distance while retaining a naive two dimensional appeal. Magical elements like the treasure chest and the wrecked ship evoke the literature of bygone times while the plentiful display of local fish and other sea life impresses with its variety of form and detail. Can you identify all the species represented? The painting manages to nudge us to environmental concern while simultaneously whetting the appetite for lunch! The mural is altogether an interesting and agreeable sight even before the question of which gorgeous local girl might have posed as the Romney Bay Mermaid tempts our thought in yet another direction... to Circe and Homer's Odysseus.



9. Landscape Mural by Ryan Kai Orme.



The young urban artist responsible for this work had only a tenuous link to the area and seemed a fine choice to reflect an alternative vision of our landscape. Without doubt one of the more artistically original and significant creations amongst the murals painted for the town, it repays, even demands, further visits as aspects of the paintings linger in the mind.

There are intimate details, there are long vistas, there are seasonal changes, there is a weird geometry and there are familiar colours. It is the Marsh of time alone with yourself and the Marsh of time eternal with itself. This is a visual world that does not explain well in words but explains perfectly nevertheless.





10. Country Fayre Parade by Phillipa Goddard.

A complex and colourful abstract by a respected resident artist, this mural captures New Romney's annual community event. This idea originated in a competition held by the IMOS Foundation at the 2011 Country Fayre. The aim was to suggest themes for a painting on a wall overlooking the site. The winning one came from former Mayor of New Romney, Clive Wire, who thought that an artwork depicting the Country Fayre itself, would be perfect for this location, serving to remind us throughout the year of the great event.

The result of this fortuitous combination is a dazzling and lively mural, capturing the essence of community spirit. The samba band offering a blaze of colour in crimson and gold, the blue and yellow uniforms of the French band from New Romney's twin town of Ardres and imaginative fancy dress costumes to the fore capture the carnival atmosphere. A wonderful mural that brightens up even the gloomiest winter day and evokes memories of that sunny July Saturday when the whole community comes together.



11. Bishop Odo. Paintings by Victoria Fontaine-Wolf after the originals and wood carving by Robert Koenig, similar.

New Romney was a prosperous Saxon town (see history: The Gift of the Sea, Romney Marsh by Anne Roper) with a lively trade and its own mint for silver coins. In 1066 the Normans tried first to invade here but were boldly repelled by the residents and had to move further up the coast. After the victory of his half-brother William the Conqueror at Hastings, Bishop Odo was sent back to sort out the town. You may read about his character on the signboard at the wall.

The town continued well however until the Great Storm in 1287 changed the landscape: see Notice nearer the Church. About this time first names in use for women included Aghata, Bretonissa, Elicia and Tethina. Those for men Hamo, Brice and Odigar. Over the next few centuries things went quite badly: many babies died at or soon after birth. One of the leading causes of death for adults was lunacy; others were malaria and lung infections. Parasites were rife. Leprosy was common enough for there to be a hospital.

The era of our present healthful climate began after the construction of the Royal Military Canal in the early 19th Century completed the system of drainage. We are now ideally placed at the centre of three great capitals of Europe, London, Paris and Brussels, with a fast train from our local station, Ashford International, to any of them. Meanwhile at home we enjoy an unusual countryside dotted with wonderful small churches and some agreeable pubs.



12. The Library Mural by Ali Stump and Paula MacArthur.

Arranged in a triptych, in Ali Stump's characteristic restricted black, grey and white, this work commands respect. Its subject, appropriate to the location, is literary. Offering homage to authors who either lived here on Romney Marsh or else wrote works about the place, some very well-known names are included. Dispersed over the painting are portraits some of these by BP National Portrait Award winner Paula MacArthur. A formally composed picture divided into book shelf like sections, there are attractive features. Amongst these is a ship in a bottle, an inscribed scroll, a quill pen, a spider hanging from his web and the New Romney town motive on an ornament. The books themselves and the lettering that adorns them are carefully researched for their proper period.



13. Flowers of Dungeness by Elizabeth Weckes.

This is the first mural a series of works by artists from the EU. Romney Marsh is only a short distance from continental Europe. There have been interactions over many centuries. In present times we have the privilege of being able to welcome our neighbours in a more friendly and cooperative spirit than ever before.

In art there has been a long and civilised exchange between the European countries and Great Britain. Mutual admiration and cross cultural influence have been the norm. Here a German artist interprets the wild flowers of Dungeness. These flowers reach their colourful peak in early summer and make a better show each passing year.

From left to right and top to bottom we have Valerian, Yellow Horned Poppy, Vipers Bugloss, Weld, Honeysuckle, Teazel, Herb Robert, Fennel, Mallow and St John's Wort. The artist is known for her interest in the natural world and is a former winner of the Max Ernst Prize. Each painting is beautifully composed showing the chosen flower in an original perspective set against backgrounds that vary in complexity and detail.

Hung together the ten pictures have a powerful impact. Anyone who has seen the flowers at Dungeness in their natural habitat will recognise the sense of being bombarded by strong, luxurious colour. Just as it is unexpected and striking there against the expanse of plain shingle it is exciting in this otherwise uninspiring urban brick passageway.



14. Romney Youth by Illesley.

Illesley is the painting name of Peter Burgess. Returning from several years working in France Peter is now a portrait painter on the British art scene. His work shows a compassion and tender interest in his subjects which is unusual in these cynical times. His palette remains somewhat influenced by the colour norms of South West France bemusing to the eyes of Romney Marsh dwellers who are surprised to later find themselves drawn to these particular shades in their own familiar landscape. It is richly used colour but soft. Tones pass gently into neighbouring ones. One is reminded of great colourists like Gauguin.

Significant attention is also given by this artist to his composition with as precise a rendering of the shapes between objects as is given to the casual but accurate display of limbs, the demeanour and the gestures of the human figures. An acute perception of the actual vulnerability of the not-yet-quite adult takes the potential threat away from these young people. And an endearing sense of their potent but clumsy humanity gives the viewer a reassuring notion of the possibility of co-operative interaction with the subject of these works.

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The mural painting project was supported by:



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Briony Kapoor

The IMOS Foundation is responsible for installing works of art in public places on Romney Marsh. It has been set up by Briony Kapoor. Briony is a writer, artist and entrepreneur who spent many years in India with her husband, Cambridge Professor of History and Philosophy of Science, Satish Chander Kapoor. It was in memory of him that the project was founded.

After studying psychology at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Briony directed the Anthropos Gallery in Central London from where she organised exhibitions of painting, sculpture and fine craft work by a range of artists from all over the world. Travels in India, around Africa, to the Arctic Circle and elsewhere in the world have been part of her inspiration.

During her stay in India her volume of poetry was published and she was responsible for the architecture and construction of a number of houses. She also designed and commissioned art and craft works there, both for a personal collection and for sale abroad. Returning to England in 1996 and following a period of charitable work, Briony set up a successful business.

In 2001 she built her own house and nearby studios which are now the venue of the IMOS Foundation Artist and Writer in Residence programmes. Briony Kapoor endeavours to embody in her life and work the joy and fulfilment of continuing creation. She is keen to share the beautiful environment that she has established and hopes to encourage and enhance creativity in others as well as fostering international understanding and co-operation particularly with the neighbouring countries of the European Union.

**The mural painting project was organised
by the IMOS Foundation**

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