

THE TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS OF BUILDING SANDOWN PAVILION 1934- 1999.

By Dave Bambrough 2010. Part one.

With increasing amounts of visitors arriving in Sandown by the 1930's there were numerous attractions for



which to keep them entertained during their stay, the principal ones were: - The Eastern Gardens, opened 1914, The Rivoli Cinema, 1921, The Queens Cinema 1928, Sandham Grounds Recreation Park, 1924, The Blue Lagoon, (Canoe Lake) 1929, The (short lived) New Beach Pavilion, 1933 (live entertainment on the site of the old Coast Guard Station), the Beach itself, and soon to be, a public Swimming Pool (named, The Blue Lagoon, relieving The Canoe Lake of its early name) due to open in 1934, plus many smaller outlets for their delectation.

There was however one noticeable attraction missing, a large Concert Hall where people could be entertained, sitting down, with live performances from well known national stars. A

percentage of people thought it necessary to broaden the local entertainment options, albeit probably not greeted with much enthusiasm by the proprietors of the town's two cinemas. Sandown did have two Pavilions prior to the building of the Pier Pavilion, one situated at the end of the Pier, Council managed, and the above-mentioned New Beach Pavilion, (originally named the Beach Huts Pavilion) privately run, neither were big enough to attract top drawer entertainment. The seating capacity at the Pier Head Pavilion was between 400-450 persons, with poor staging and dressing room accommodation totally inadequate for the requirements of a first class company, the New Beach Pavilion offered even less.

The few details that survive of the New Beach Pavilion are as follows: It was first advertised in 1933 as being near the Canoe Lake, although actually situated where Colonel Bogey's Night Club now stands.

As can be seen from the advert, they boasted a big cast of famous broadcasting artists that are not traceable today and were probably not top-drawer artistes at the time.

When the White City Amusement Park took over the Beach Pavilion they developed the area into a Dodgem

New Beach Pavilion, SANDOWN.	
Proprietors: I. K. & L. A. WRIGHT.	Manager: STAN L. HILLS.
NIGHTLY AT 8.15	DOORS OPEN 7.50
COMMENCING SATURDAY NEXT JUNE 3rd.	
LEON WRIGHT Presents The Super Concert-Variety Production	
STARLIGHTS <i>including The Famous Broadcasting Stars:</i>	
TOMMY WALKER <i>The most popular Entertainer, Character Comedian, Great Area leading Theatres.</i>	
CICELY SAWYER <i>Soubrette, Late Co-Queen of No. 1 Company.</i>	EDWARD HARVEY <i>Light Comedian.</i>
BEATRICE GALLEWAY <i>Soprano, of B.S.C. Stars.</i>	LEO DORANI Great Star of Opera House. <i>Tenor, Royal Carl Rosa-O'Mara Opera Coys.</i>
VALERIE MAUDE <i>Vocalist, Televison & B.S.C. Star.</i>	PAT WORTH <i>The Comedian, who made Empire Laugh.</i>
Leon Wright & His Famous Orchestra <i>Direct from his successful season at the Playhouse.</i>	
With original Scenery & Costumes - Witty Dialogue - Beautiful Melodies. A succession of lovely Stage Pictures, so charming that "The Production was an instantaneous success."	
SPECIAL ATTRACTION. First Sunday Concert of the Season - June 4th, at 8.15 p.m. All Star Artists supported by Leon Wright's Famous Orchestra. SUNDAY NEXT, JUNE 4th.	
PRICES (including Tax) : Reserved 3/-, 2/6, 2/- ; Unreserved 1/6, 1/3. Seats may be reserved at Martin's Library, 2 High Street, Sandown, Tel. 90, or at the Box Office. Phone Sandown 224.	

Car Track. The Dodgem-Track was suspended on concrete pillars over the original Pavilion seating area, which brought it up to the level of the amusement park floor. The theatre seating was slightly higher than the dressing rooms, which were situated under the stage. The stage sloped towards the audience who were sitting in seats that were on a flat level floor; this enabled the audience to see the actors at the back of the stage. There was a doorway that led down to the Pavilion dressing rooms that accessed under the dodgem-track where the White City staff used to grow mushrooms in the dark and damp flat area previously used for the Pavilion seating. The room under the stage was converted into the White City Offices on closure and used for the counting of thousands of pennies, extracted from the slot machines. This area also housed the electric generator that ran the machines until 10. p.m., when the supply was switched to the National Grid. The stage, which remained in-situ after the conversion, was accessed by three or four steps where the amusement machines were repaired and the major prizes for Bingo and the Electric Greyhound racing were stored. (My thanks to Roy Bridger, formerly from Fort Street for this

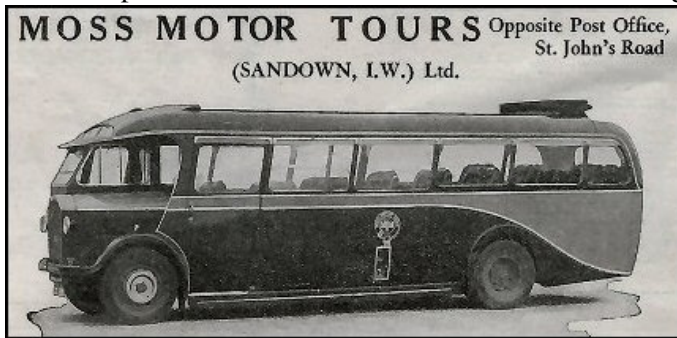
information).

At the December 1929 Council meeting, Major D. W. Moss (a high profile Sandown Councillor of the time) introduced a subject for early consideration, the erection of a new Pavilion, either on the Pier or some other site on the Esplanade. He said that it was a matter of urgency and should be decided with immediate haste due to the forthcoming amalgamation of the Sandown and Shanklin Councils. (April 1st 1933). His thinking was, that with a united council the Shanklin members might not be inclined to spend their ratepayer's money for the pleasure of Sandown holidaymakers. (At this time local councillors controlled and spent the rates levied on the parishioners).

There were strong views by some members that a Pavilion should not be erected on or near the Pier, as it would blot out the splendid views of the bay from nearby vantage points. Many others felt, that a Pavilion was an unnecessary expenditure at this time of economic crisis and should not be built at all. Major Moss's motion however was carried by a majority vote.

Shanklin had theatres, and it was very noticeable that 100's of visitors travelled nightly by bus and coach (Major Moss's coaches) to their venues, spending money in Shanklin, which would remain in the hands of Sandown businesses if a grand attraction such as this was built. The majority of Council members recognised this and in 1929 rumours began to spread on how they intended to resolve this entertainment void.

The collapse of Wall Street in 1929 had a devastating knock on affect in Britain, causing huge financial



problems, unemployment and a general lack of money. Between 1929 and 1933 the British economy fell by 5%. It took until 1936 when the imminent fear of war bolstered employment figures somewhat. This situation of course seriously affected the holiday trade at the time and one of Sandown's largest hotels, the Ocean, was offered for sale.

At a special meeting on Monday October 5th 1931 the Sandown Urban District Council carried by

eight votes to five a resolution in favour of the purchase of the greater part of the Ocean Hotel for the sum of £12,500. The section offered to the town commenced from the Mascot Café in the High Street, continuing to the slipway (Esplanade Road). It included, the license, a galleried lounge, ballroom, restaurant, writing room and over 60 guest rooms, the land eastward of the main building and the lawns on the seaside of the property.

The council's intention with the purchase was to provide the aforementioned Concert Hall and Winter Gardens accommodation. Further, that application be made to the Ministry of Health under the provision of the Public Health Acts relating to the borrowing of the sum of £13,000 to be repayable within 40 years, to cover the

purchase price and costs.

This proposal was not to everyone's liking, spending money they considered was needed to further develop other local amenities i.e. the Pier, the Waterworks, Sandham Grounds and the Barrack Battery etc, there was always the slim hope that private investment might help out.

For those old enough to remember them, here are the names of the Council members and how they voted: - In favour: Messrs. Harman, Cradock, Wheway, Hawkins, Byerley, Thompson, Bartlett and Moorman. Against: Miss Baillie, Mrs Taylor, Messrs. Woolger, Adams and Hubert.



The Mascot Cafe, right foreground, in the High Street of 1931.

The objections from ratepayers started

immediately, with a barrage of questions; if the Ocean was a paying concern (which it professed to be) why did the owners want to sell it? Why did it not include the three valuable properties at the western end of the hotel? As far as the license was concerned, who would want to drink in a council pub? If the bedrooms were to be let, what did the council know about the lodging house business? If they intend to pull a section down to build a concert hall, how many thousands would it cost to build it? The ratepayers also wished to know what other expenses would be incurred? Plus, the Ocean at the time was a valuable ratepayer, to the tune of £200 a year, another loss? And so on!

In response to the Councils application request for the loan of £13,000, Mr G. M. McNaughton Engineering Inspector of the Ministry of Health opened an inquiry at 9.45 a.m. on November 12th 1931 at the Town Hall. (£1 in 1931 now equates to approximately £50.78 in 2009). £13,000 represents £660,180.72p in today's money. The councils Clerk (Mr N. Douglas Best) then gave a long exhaustive statement on the merits of being awarded the loan and an insight into the present financial state of the town. The overall summer ingress of visitors was estimated to be approximately 20,000; the total outstanding loan debt for the town was £106,406; (equating to approx. £5½ million in today's money) outstanding loans in respect of public walks and pleasure grounds, £20,755; rateable value of the district £54,744.

His description of the Ocean Hotel premises was that the site was without comparison for the requirements, which was an absolute necessity to maintain Sandown's claim to be one of the Islands foremost resorts. Sandown he said must add to the attractions, which it could offer to visitors upon whom depended the livelihood of at least 90% of its population. (The other 10% would also be affected of course, with an increase in rates)?

Shanklin he pointed out had two large Concert Halls and Rylstone Gardens, where community singing attracted 100's of visitors. Also, they (Shanklin) had obtained approval of a £14,000 loan for a concert hall at the Town Hall site, to seat 1000 people. In addition to this they had also obtained sanction to borrow £13,000 for the purchase of the Manor Estate, all of this despite the fact that the population was less than Sandown's.

He then reflected that Sandown's only Concert Hall was that at the end of the Pier, built 40 years previously with a seating capacity of 450 maximum and only a very small stage. (The New Beach Pavilion was not yet up and running, but it would be before the Pier Pavilion was built).

Further benefits said Mr Best of converting the Ocean Hotel were that it would be available for conferences. The Urban Districts Council's Association had invited Sandown Council to submit the town as the venue for their annual conference, but in the absence of a hall to seat at least 1,000 people this had not been possible. Regarding the matter of the license, he said that as there were no other licensed premises in the High Street the income could not fail to be anything other than considerable. The license would also allow the café and ballroom to be run to much greater advantage. They (the council) proposed to use the ballroom for good class dances, and the extensive lawns abutting the Esplanade would be used for community singing and light orchestral music. Regarding the 61 bedrooms, the council were confident they would have no difficulty in letting the rooms during the season to hotel and boarding house proprietors.

Continuing, he said that there was support for the present council administration being removed from the existing offices to the Ocean Hotel and a long felt want for the provision of an Information Bureau. His last supportive delivery was that the 260 feet of valuable frontage would prove a considerable source of revenue if developed, as and when the need for business accommodation arose.

Against the proposed Concert Hall were a group of vociferous ratepayers led by one Mr Cyril Goodman, C.B.E. He referred to a petition that had been forwarded to the Ministry in opposition to the scheme containing 870 signatures, all he said were electors of the district, but it might include a small number that were not.

The opposition, Dr. Goodman asserted, represented poor people with no money. He said that the likes of others and himself were not opposed to progress and some had gained great unpopularity because of the progress they had advocated during the last ten years. (Probably a reference to the debacle over the Sandham Grounds). Further, he contended that any expenditure on loan except where absolutely necessary was contrary to the interests of the town and not in accordance with what other authorities were doing. The Ocean Hotel, apart from the Pier Hotel at Seaview was the only hotel on the Island that attracted rich people with money to spend. The town would be far better off if it were purchased privately and eventually re-opened as a hotel. So far as a Winter Garden was concerned, he totally discounted the idea because of the failure of previous experiments to promote a winter season. Spending £13,000 on the purchase of a site and another £13,000 for the building, the proposal would probably result in a considerable financial loss. And to provide increased competition against the Shanklin companies would more than likely mean that both sides might end up with losses. Stressing the necessity for the strictest economy in the next few years, Dr. Goodman said that Sandown's one industry was a luxury and seasonal one, and the present economic depression came too late to affect the 1931 season but it was likely to badly affect Sandown's seasons for a few years to come.

The concluding statement at the Ministry inquiry came from Lieut. - Col. G. H. Redfern, supporting the opposition, he said that twenty years ago (1911) Sandown was a high-class seaside place, but it had drifted downhill because of provision for the poorer visitors. He deprecated the closing of a high-class hotel (The Ocean) but hoped it would be sold privately and continue as such. (An interesting 1931 attitude that would surely have raised eyebrows in many quarters today)!!! The inquiry concluded at nearly 2 o'clock and the Inspector was thanked for the patient hearing he had given, he then proceeded to visit the property concerned.

A letter to the Chronicle at this early time of discussion suggested that whatever the outcome of the proposed new Pavilion on no account should the inadequate and obsolete current Pier Pavilion be patched up. He



considered it had had its day, thought it was an eyesore and should be converted into a café and dance hall. (Mr W. R. Kirman, writer of the letter was obviously a man of influence, because his idea was later to be adopted). Mr Ivan Hooper, part owner of Sandown Canoe Lake expressed similar sentiments. "The sooner Sandown realises that it must have a big entertainment hall near the front, the better it will be. The town he said needs a hall of some proportions, not something like the present Pavilion. (Pictured above). On Friday November 20th 1931 a telegram was received from the Ministry of Health in reference to the proposed purchase by the Council of the Ocean Hotel, stating, "Regret cannot sanction purchase of Ocean Hotel", letter to follow. A special meeting was then convened on the 26th for the official reading of the letter to council members. The basics of it was, that whilst the Minister was generally in sympathy with the Council's wish to develop amenities of their district, in the present economic climate and the local opposition he considered that a much stronger case was needed to justify it. So the Council's application for a loan was declined. (To be continued).