

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

By Dave Bambrough 2010. (Part three).

By now the Councils of Sandown & Shanklin had amalgamated, but this event did nothing to curtail further hostilities from Dr. Billups. At a meeting of the Sandown & Shanklin ratepayers held at the Palmerston Hall, Shanklin on Monday May 15th 1933, a two hour debate of dedicated haranguing concluded with a majority of 51 votes to 2. It carried a resolution that the Sandown Pier Concert Hall scheme should not be carried without further consideration, and, until a poll of the district was carried out.

The protestations continued over the next few months to no avail, the Council continued ignoring Dr. Billups and his merry men and continued about their daily business. On September 14th 1933 at the monthly meeting of the Sandown-Shanklin Council a resolution accepting a tender for £22,774 was carried, practically without discussion, by ten votes to four. Minutes now presented showed that at a meeting in committee the previous day the Council had received the tenders for the erection of the sub-structure and super structure of the proposed Concert Pavilion and had read the joint report of the consulting engineer (Mr Latham) and Architect (Mr Clare). Both were in attendance.

The Council, after proposal and seconding, decided to recommend that the tenders of Messrs J. B. Edwards and Co., Ltd, of London for the aggregate net sum of £22, 774. 12s. 6d. be accepted, and that instructions were given for proceeding with the work required. Council in committee further recommended that Mr E. Thompson, B. Sc. (Engineering), was appointed resident engineer in charge of the contract work in the construction of the sub-structure at a salary of £7 a week. It was also decided that three committee members would be appointed to interview the Ministry of Transport to endeavour to secure an extension of the 20 years loan period, authorised for the repayment of the sum borrowed.

There then ensued strong criticism over the choice of tenders. It was stated that there was only a marginal difference of £13 between the lower of the two tenders and it was suggested that some skulduggery may have taken place. It was inferred that possible collusion existed between the winning company, the Consulting Engineer and the Architect. The inference suggested, was, that it was possible that the accepted tender had been lowered on prior knowledge of the other lower estimate to ensure acceptance by the council at the meeting the previous day. This of course was totally refuted with assurances from the Clerk that the tenders had not been touched in any-way, the motion to accept was carried by 10 votes to 4.

Even though there was a substantial amount of incompatibility at this early stage of the amalgamation of the two Council's, (now 6 months) one such issue being a loss by Sandown of £362 against a profit of £562 contributed by Shanklin to the pool, the Sandown members however were about to realise their ambition of a Concert Hall/Pavilion on their Pier.

Work began in early October 1933 with the closing of the Pier. The few men employed at this early stage were taking down windscreens and ripping up decking, along with four Scotsmen building the iron cages, a particularly skilled job that formed the foundations of the piles. Three months were estimated for the completion of the sub-structure, five months for the super-structure and four months, not estimated at the time for various inevitable delays that would occur. (One such inevitable delay was the holding up of a large consignment of tools and materials by the Southern Railway company).

The contractor's appointed foreman (Mr G. H. Webb) had previous experience from 1922-1931 on the construction of new docks in Mombassa and had also worked as a diver on the salvage of the St. Louis in 1919, which sank off Shanklin during the First World War with a cargo of grain, flour and ammunition.

The casting of the piles aroused great interest amongst the public, who were also drawn to the spectacle of winter night-time entertainment in great numbers to watch the floodlight pile driving. The main reason for the nightshift working was to take advantage of low tides in order to expedite the proceedings.

The finished piles had to go through a process known as "curing", which required them being kept damp with the aid of a lawn sprinkler for 24 hours, the first pile was driven on October 26th 1933. The sub-structure was complete by early May and work began in earnest on the erection of the new Pavilion.

With the summer season approaching, the contractors arranged access to the original Pavilion for the opening of a concert party "Hello Happiness" at Whitsuntide, guaranteeing safe passage via the new construction.

By mid July 1934 rapid strides had been made toward the completion of the building. By then Mr Clare (consulting architect) advised and had received acceptance for the following tenders for furnishings at the new Pavilion. These included; carpets, curtains, battens, lighting fittings and rubber flooring.

At a Council gathering in September 1934 a further suggestion was voiced by one of the main opponents of the scheme, Mr W. H. Brown. Having fiercely objected to the amount of money proposed to be spent on behalf of the ratepayers, he now suggested the building of a new entrance, coupled with the possibilities of a new car park beneath the entrance, which involved an estimated expenditure of a further £7,000. The idea was rejected on an amendment to delay the proposal for at least a year by 9 votes to 3. Further subjects continued to cause controversy to the construction, such as, lack of drainage and problems with the stage, but eventually all were overcome, or so they thought.

The resident Engineer, Mr E. H. Thomson gave a statistical talk concerning the construction of the Pier at a luncheon of the Sandown Rotary Club on Tuesday 2nd October 1934 with the knowledge that the opening was now imminent.

The opening date was scheduled for October 23rd 1934, the Council having engaged Lord and Lady Jellicoe to perform the honours. (British Royal Navy Admiral who commanded the Grand Fleet at the Battle of Jutland in World War I).

Murray Ashford's concert party then appearing at Scarborough, were engaged for the 24th and 25th at a fee of £50 for the first night and £30 for the second. (Digressing. Frederick Murray Ashford was a finalist at the 880 metres at the 1908 Summer Olympics in London. As a young man he studied the piano and organ at the Royal Academy of Music but later developed a fine tenor voice around which he built a Concert Party, which played the season at Scarborough every year from 1929-39).

The Council also granted permission for the annual Armistice service on Sunday November 11th to be held at the Pavilion and for a combined concert by the Sandown & Shanklin Choral Societies on December 12th. It was also decided to extend an invitation to the Labour party to hold their 1935 Conference there, which was politely refused.

During November 1934, Mr Brown's suggestion of re-designing the entrance had obviously appealed to the architect (Mr A. D. Clare) who submitted a report on a proposed new approach and car park, together with plans and prospective drawings. The Amusement Committee were authorised to examine details of the scheme with a view to submission of a report at a convenient date after consideration of the local rates estimate for the following year. That was as far as the idea ever went.

The Pavilion, Sandown.
TUESDAY, 23rd OCTOBER,
at 3 p.m.
Official Opening
by
Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe,
G.C.B., O.M., G.C.V.O., D.L.
Selections by the Orchestra under the direction of
Mr. E. A. ENGLISH, Mus. Bac. (Oxon), F.R.C.O.
A Cordial Invitation is extended to the Public.
Admission Free.

WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY,
October 24th & 25th, at 8.15 p.m.
Grand Opening Attraction.
Murray Ashford & Wilby Lunn present
THE BOUQUETS
"Scarborough's brilliant contribution to broadcasting."
— *Yorksire Post.*
Prices of Admission : 2/6 Reserved, 1/- Unreserved.
Seats can be booked at the box office, Pier Gates (Tel. 61) or at
Martin's Library, High Street, Sandown (Tel. 90).

In February 1935 workmen began alterations to the Pier entrance. The original iron gates were removed and scrapped, but the turnstiles were destined for a new position within a few feet of the new Pavilion and a form of sliding gate replaced the iron gates. In conjunction with the turnstiles two new booking offices were erected, one for concert party bookings and the other for Steamer Traffic and Fishing, etc. A tender from Messrs. F. & L. Whittington of £242 10s was accepted for this task.

The Entertainments Manager and the Pier Master interviewed all applicants for summer staff jobs and made the necessary appointments. The requirements for 1935 were as follows; Senior Deck hand £2 10s, Senior Toll House Clerk £2 15s and assistant Deck Hand £2, all per week and there was also a requirement for three female attendants for various duties.

By July of 1935 whilst the Pier was turning out to be a very successful venture the Council decided that where economy could be introduced then it would be. One of the first measures introduced by the Amusement Committee was to discontinue the presence of uniformed members of the Fire Brigade at shows. It was felt that the present staff could carry out all the

duties necessary in the case of fire.

As early as June 1938 after just over three years of existence, the local papers were extolling the virtues of the erection of the Pavilion. Whether Dr Billups ever appreciated the folly of his resistance (predicting a "White Elephant") to the scheme we will never know, as he died in August 1936 with the Pavilion less than two years old. On June 5th 1938 a record number of 1,427 people paid for admission with many more unable to gain admission to the evening show. (No doubt the staff were very pleased that a fire did not break out that night).

With the matinee performance, an unprecedented total of 2000 people attended the single days performance. Another interesting statistic was created by one Mr G. Polton, a well-known Ventnor Photographer. He occupied the same seat in the stalls for four years on a Saturday night, being one of the first in the theatre and not leaving until the last train to Ventnor was due. Local history was made on August 12th 1937 when the first wireless (radio) broadcast was made from the Pavilion. The Pavilion was linked up with, Hastings, Llandudno and Eastbourne to relay part of each programme to the national Network. The broadcast was due to run from 8.30, ending at 9.40pm, with the Sandown part of the programme commencing at one minute past nine, with the in house Fol-De-Rols providing the entertainment.

Some relevant statistics regarding the building of the Pavilion are as follows; the piles went down about 20 feet, driven into blue slipper rock, fortuitously, a good foundation. The deck beams varied in section, there being some 200 of them and 30 different sections. The deck had a uniform thickness of 6 inches. There were 125 tons of steel used in the construction, the balcony girder weighed 30 tons and over 250,000 bricks were used, all manufactured on the Island. Aggregates (material such as sand or gravel used with cement and water to make concrete, mortar, or plaster) and timber were all from Island depots. The building was erected on Ciment-Fondu. (Ciment Fondu is cement that sets in about six hours but begins to become solid in a much shorter time).

There were teething problems, most fairly insignificant. Structural defects occurred for which the contractor was informed that it was his responsibility to put right. Plus, additional work was necessary to correct dampness in the interior of the Pavilion. Sixty percent of the labour was employed from the Island and the end result was a safety record to be proud of, no accidents recorded to any employee.

Most of the original consternation in Council was regarding the cost of the venture, and even after completion there was still more disagreement over finance. In February 1935 it was revealed that an extra £2000 had been paid to the Contractor over some structural alterations that had taken place. It appears that legal advice and consultation took place between the Council and the Contractors with the result that the extra £2000 was paid by the local authority in full and final settlement of an exceptional claim by the contractor in respect of the sub-structure. The accepted reason was that most of the £2000 was brought about by the amendment of plans in connection with the stage. Such alterations were decided upon after the work had been well advanced, necessitating new plans being drawn. This caused a considerable delay with a large amount of the money costed to labour charges. Needless to say, Dr. Billups had his fair share to say on the matter.

This has been a brief insight into the uphill struggle that eventually resulted in the building of Sandown Pier Pavilion. It brought a lot of pleasure to thousands of people for over sixty years, sadly though, whilst the building still exists the reason for its construction has long since been sold off.

Next Chronicle. A look at some of the stars that appeared at the Pavilion between 1949 and 1968.



Front Elevation of the new Pavilion, taken on October 22nd 1934.

THE PAVILION, SANDOWN.
(Telephone 61).

STUPENDOUS ATTRACTION!

SUNDAY, January 27th,
at 8.15 p.m.

JACK PAYNE
WITH
HIS BAND.

Admission 3/6 & 2/6 Reserved; 1/3 Unreserved.
EARLY BOOKING ADVISABLE.

Book now at the Box Offices, The Pavilion, Sandown (Tel. 61), and Shanklin Theatre (Tel. 134); also at Martin's Library, Sandown (Tel. 90); Ramsden's Library, Shanklin (Tel. 64); Murdoch's, Newport (Tel. 200).

July 1935