

The Eastern Pleasure Gardens

By Dave Bambrough (Part three)

A new innovation for the summer of 1936 was the instalment of flood lighting to the Gardens. Sandown Gas Company offered to supply and fix on existing columns, six light lamps, fitted with a special directional type of reflector and to supply and fix two ten-light special floodlight lamps (one on each side of the Gardens). The inclusive cost for the lamps was £56 3s, in respect of which the company offered to defray 50 per cent of the cost and to accept payment by the council of the balance by quarterly instalments of £2 11s 6d over a period of three years.

The charge for the gas and maintenance on the basis of lighting all the lamps nightly during the months of June, July, August and September and only six of the lamps during Easter week and the Christmas season, would be £16 per annum. This quotation was accepted.

With the newly installed floodlighting now in place, the Town Band experienced a more acceptable problem in the summer of 1937, (their second season), this was accommodating the large crowds that turned up to listen. Although the Council were urged to provide more seating, many were content to stand in the gardens and on the pavement above. The Band under the able direction of Mr Herbert J. Adams (conductor), maintained their high standard as amateur musicians with nicely varied programmes. A feature of recent concerts originated by the audience themselves had been community singing of old favourites.

1939 saw a replacement of the unsatisfactory bandstand awning with green waterproof canvas. This at least meant that performances would be undisturbed by draughts or raindrops percolating through the canvas. The town councils of Sandown & Shanklin had amalgamated in 1928 and in 1939 both towns Military Bands followed suit.

On the outbreak of war, the Gardens, along with the beaches were barricaded by barbed wire and rendered out of bounds to the public for the duration of the conflict.

On cessation of hostilities in 1945 a sub-committee consisting of Lt-Colonel G.W. Spencer, Mr W.H. Brown, Mrs Reid and the Surveyor were appointed to meet at the Gardens and to report on the question of improvements there, in connection with the provision of musical entertainment for the forthcoming seasons. It is uncertain what sort of entertainment was approved in the early post war years, but a proposal for the summer of 1948 by a Mr Wakefield, to hold a Concert Party in the gardens was rejected.

By 1950 the Sandown – Shanklin Council of Churches were providing open-air services monthly at 8pm but the bandstand had become redundant.



An offer to the proprietor of the Nicholas Corelli Marionettes for the entertainment rights for the season at a rental of £25 was accepted on the understanding that £15 would be payable in advance, with use of the councils chairs included in the price.

The show consisted of a 50-minute variety programme by the puppets with the added attraction of Uncle Leo and his "Boy in the Box". The council renewed the franchise with the Milton Brothers for the 1951/2

season subject to a payment of £20 in advance and a further payment of £20 on August 1st. Performances were permitted on Sundays at the levy of another £5, providing the Gardens were not required by the Council or during the hours of religious services. No charge was permitted during any performance for any public seating, so the only way of securing revenue was through a collecting bag. After completing the 1953 season the Miltons decided not to renew the franchise again.



In 1956 the council received a proposal from a Mr Woodnutt of Adelaide House, Carter Street, for the running of a children's amusement centre within the grounds. This was referred to the surveyor for examination and report on costs and rent offered. The proposal required the removal of turf at a cost of £360 and it's replacement with a hard surface for mechanical toys and drainage. Mr Woodnutt was invited to submit details of his proposal but the idea was never implemented.

For public entertainment the Sandown & Shanklin Military Band played every Thursday at 8pm. Another Band to visit the Gardens on the 9th September 1960 for a special visit was The Regimental Band of The Tenth Royal Hussars (The Prince of Wales Own) with a display team accompanying

them.

The Gardens continued with entertainment from local bands and on Sunday June 13th 1963 the second in a series of open-air services organised by the Sandown & Lake Council Churches attracted a large evening attendance. Short addresses were given by the Rev. J.S. Swain Minister of Sandown Baptist Church and Mr W.

Wheeler a Baptist layman. The lesson was read by a London teenager holidaying in the area and the welcome was given by the Rev. Leonard R. Jennings, with prayer and blessing by the Vicar of Lake, the Rev. J. Outram. These services continued weekly until the first week in September.

During this summer the Gardens suffered wanton damage making it difficult to maintain them in the accustomed manner. The entertainments committee were recommended to find alternative uses for the site, possibly revenue producing.

This came about with the introduction of trampolines to the gardens in the 1960's as a way of providing amusement for children, but an application to extend them in 1971 was refused. One week later a further proposal to introduce children's swinging boats and a slide were also turned down and vandalism was on the increase with 87 panes of glass in the adjoining chalets smashed.

By the end of the 1971 season the Eastern Gardens made a depressing picture and many local residents claimed that it looked little better at the height of the season. Broken wattle fencing at the site of the old bandstand and a general atmosphere of neglect would not have impressed the holidaymakers making their first approach to the Esplanade and beach at this busy point. Some twenty years previously the Sandown-Shanklin U.D.C. had acquired houses on the beach adjacent to the gardens. Once again the idea was for further development, including extension of the Esplanade. Economics were no doubt responsible for the failure to implement the scheme.

The Gardens once referred to as a Sandown beauty spot gradually declined into a sad run down shadow of their former self. Successive councils failed to introduce the required amount of upkeep for which to maintain previous standards, so eventually the inevitable face changing plans were introduced.

In June 1999 Southern Water were granted planning permission for a new control building, associated storm water storage and pumping station improvements. This was followed with new public conveniences and associated landscaping. Planning permission for a new bandstand and canopy were passed by the Isle of Wight Council in 2000, but the canopy it seems, never came to fruition. Drastic change that may well have been forced on the Council has deprived Sandown of yet another of its social amenities that we will never see the likes of again.



One of the last pictures taken of the Gardens prior to demolition, circa 1999.



Extensive alterations taking place in March 2000.



No more the beautiful Eastern Gardens in 2007.