

## The Eastern Pleasure Gardens

By Dave Bambrough (Part two)

The council had gone as far as to tip a large amount of soil, recently removed from the top of Lake Hill, onto the ground of the proposed extension prior to turfing the area.

By December 1921 the cost of the extension plans had risen from £2400 to £3000. £800 was earmarked for the laying out of the extension with two tennis courts and a bowling green, but to fit all of this in meant demolishing the seven-year-old toilets.



**Sandown in halcyon days when the Gardens were a place of beauty and so was Sandown.**

On December 1<sup>st</sup> at the Town Hall, 250 ratepayers met to voice their non-approval of any further development of the Gardens, it was the largest gathering of its kind in living memory.

One of the reasons put forward by the council as a ploy to encourage some good will towards the proposed extension, was, that there were 42 unemployed ex service men in the town who would be suitably employed thereon. However, the out of work servicemen held no sway with the meeting, which soundly voted out any extension proposals that the council had suggested for the existing gardens.

December 1921's council meeting also brought about a decision to have a referendum on the matter for which to find a way out of their difficulty over the proposed extension of the esplanade and the gardens. On January 12<sup>th</sup> 1922 the Ministry of Health held a local inquiry into the application from the council for a sanction to borrow £3000 for extending the sea wall and enlargement of the grounds. By the end of March 1922 all bodies concerned with awarding the grants had unanimously turned them down.

Realizing that they were flogging a dead horse on all fronts, the referendum was scrapped and a modified plan drawn up to enlarge the grounds on a smaller scale at a total cost of £810. Councillor Major Moss then stated, that with refusal of the grants and the ratepayers not wanting it, in his opinion the whole scheme was dead. Another councillor highlighted the fact that the pile of earth (60 loads from the top of Lake Hill) which now had to be removed, was valued at 3s 6d per load and that this privilege should not be

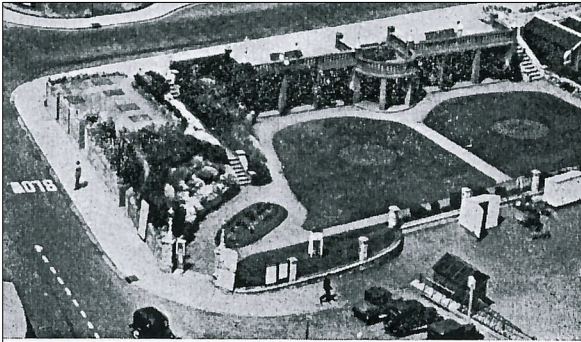
given to one person, as the local people might like some of the spoil.

Such was the uproar, confusion and annoyance within the council and around the town, the council meeting held in May 1922 suspended any further discussion on the matter for 6 months. The ground had been bought from the Russell Trustees but time was needed for rational thinking as to what would be the next step. As usual things did not improve, the town band had not performed by mid summer and the mound of soil on the adjacent land had become a playground for local children. A letter from the former owners of the land, Sandown Hotel, stated that the grounds had become an "unhealthy den".

With the summer over, October 1922 brought fresh hope that the council would realise their ambitions of an extension. The Unemployment Grants Committee stated, that if the council were prepared to draw 50% of their labour force from Cowes Urban District Council the Ministry of Labour would consent to issue the certificate for the purpose of covering any formal application for state aid, to which the Sandown Council might be contemplating. The plans included the enlargement of the Eastern Pleasure Gardens, extension of the sea wall to Herne Hill Groyne and the construction of a new groyne, at or near the Eastern Boundary of the district. The motion was defeated by 11 votes to 4 and it was decided that the matter would not be referred to again. A further special meeting on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> December 1922 called for the complete abandonment of any Eastern Gardens extension, or of extending the sea wall, but to defer for one year plans to construct a new groyne at the eastern boundary. The motion to abandon the scheme was carried, but there was a further suggestion, to build a bandstand within the grounds.

Forever a problem child for the council, in Jan 1923 it was decided that a hedge and thatched shelter that divided the gardens from the £500 of waste ground that they now owned, would be removed and the unused area levelled and the ground made good. The mound of soil now had a new destiny and the council had a new

baby, determined to build their tennis courts and putting green it was decided to remove the unwanted soil to the Louisville estate and there they would achieve their goal.



Final layout of the Gardens prior to the bandstand being built.

The Louisville estate would shortly be renamed “The Sandham Grounds Recreation Park”, but what of the spare ground east of the gardens? Probably the obvious solution came in July 1923, a row of bathing huts were erected. The situation remains the same today.

Presumably, by now, everyone was happy, the ratepayers had got their way (abandonment of the extension) the council had resolved their desire to have tennis and golf amenities available for visitors, with their conversion of the Louisville estate into a park. The money that the ratepayers had bitterly fought against spending for further development of the Gardens had now been saved, but vast amounts of it would be needed to convert the Louisville

estate wilderness into a pleasure park. There were many other issues to resolve before any plans to develop this area would go ahead. (another story).

The Gardens now aspired to their roll in the town’s development. Not only was it an area of beauty with modern toilet facilities, it also provided people with summer entertainment and gave leisure seekers a very relaxing place to sit and enjoy the time of day. Many a courting couple made use of the seated areas under the balustrades after an evening at one of the towns’ two cinemas, for purposes of becoming better acquainted with one another.

Despite the seeming tranquillity the Gardens were never out of the council’s business agenda for long, more headaches generated in the summer of 1924. Clan’s Alfresco Concert Party appeared there holding a series of open-air dances throughout the summer for which they relied on collections to subsidise the council’s rent. They found it hard to balance their books, as even though people professed to enjoy the dancing, contributions gathered in the collection bags were mainly full of ha’penny’s, farthings and buttons.

1927 brought about an extension of the lavatories at a cost of £150, and the following year a rockery was built, paid for out of the Council emergency fund at a cost of £10.

The Gardens lay quietly dormant over the next few years whilst the Council fulfilled their much-desired objective of creating tennis and putting green facilities within the Sandham Grounds. In 1932 an offer from Mr A.F.Le Maitre to rent the Gardens for £200 per season for a three-season tenancy to run approved amusements there was debated by the general Purposes Committee. There was an objection from a Mrs Taylor who pointed out that the gardens were built with ratepayers’ money and she doubted the legality of obtaining revenue this way. Councillor Hubert added that in the past the Council had tried to keep the town free of noisy and undesirable games. He thought that Shanklin had let itself down very much by introducing these types of games on the sea front and on the pier. Councillor Hawkins said that regards the legality, members might sleep peacefully, and to try and put a damper on something that would produce a penny rate, passed his comprehension. Mr Le Maitre was held in the highest esteem, having provided games of this nature in other parts of the town and the recommendation was approved. (Mr A. F. Le Maitre eventually became Chairman of the Town Council, a magistrate and manager of White City Amusements Arcade).

There were apparently many restrictions on the use of the Gardens so a report was submitted in May 1935 to the County Council with a view to the Town Band performing there. The vice chairman of the amusement committee was directed to interview the manager of the Sandown Hotel in reference to the proposals of the council for band performances in the gardens during the summer. After consideration the amusement committee gave instructions to the surveyor to proceed with the construction of a bandstand in the Gardens on a selected site. The spokesman, Capt. Horsley, said that a stand was being erected over the shore so that any infringement of the agreement, not to use the land for building purposes, would not arise.

Having overcome any objections that the Sandown Hotel or any other party may have put forward, the Sandown Military Band was commissioned to entertain in the gardens commencing the summer of 1936. They were to be subsidised to the amount of £250 in return for a minimum of 50 performances. Furthermore the council would make guaranteed engagements for them bringing in revenue of £120 and make a grant of £30 toward provision of new music. The Band would be allowed to take collections and receipts from the letting of the chairs, provided by the council, which it was estimated would provide an estimated income of £200 for the season. Their concerts at the Gardens were agreed for Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings (request night). They were also permitted to use the Bandstand opposite Sandown Pier for Sunday afternoons and evening performances from Whitsuntide until the commencement of Sunday performances at the Pier Pavilion. (Concluding part next Chronicle).