

# Streets of Bournemouth Leisure

In the early Bourne, residents and visitors alike had to organise their own leisure. They could bathe in the sea, walk through the pinewoods and across the heaths or stroll along the beach and cliffs. They might also ride into the countryside or to nearby towns, shoot or fish or meet socially in their homes.

The opening of the Bath Hotel in 1838 and the Belle Vue Boarding House in 1839 provided the first more public access to entertainment. Musical entertainment grew from bands into the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Gradually sports clubs and facilities, the parks and theatres and many other facilities expanded and waned as fashions varied or as municipal provision developed (not always without controversy). Formerly important places such as the Winter Gardens disappeared, and the controversial IMAX cinema replaced the Pier Approach Baths. By the Bicentenary, more individual leisure activities had appeared such as surfing. For many people, however, strolling along the seafront, shopping, golf, the local sports clubs remained their main leisure activities.



ABOVE

Surfing west of Boscombe Pier,  
November 2009

LEFT

Children's Corner, Lower  
Pleasure Gardens in about  
1905



Streets of  
Bournemouth





## **LEISURE**

**This Theme includes the following Sub-Themes:**

**Time to spare**

**Nothing to do in Bournemouth?**

**That's entertainment**

**Sport**

**The media age**

### **Time to spare**

Leisure is having the freedom from the demands of work or duty. The origins of Bournemouth begin with the aristocracy and gentry having time to spend by the sea for health and leisure. Later benefits of an industrialising society and the town would develop following of the introduction of paid holidays and improved public transport. Residents and visitors could enjoy the same amenities, not least of which was the best seaside landscape in England. A summary of the leisure activities in the town over 200 years begins with the simple amusements of the first visitors, the growth of municipal facilities, the rise of popular entertainment in the 20th century, and currently the media age. People in 2010 are lucky: they have a wide range of leisure activities from which to choose.

Lewis Tregonwell built a summer home for his family in the peace and quiet of the undeveloped landscape around the mouth of the Bourne. Tregonwell was a member of the aristocracy and would have known the best families in the area but he and his family would have been dependent on making their own entertainment away from the hustle and bustle of society life. The novels of Jane Austen give an idea of how they might have entertained themselves, especially devising their own simple amusements. It would be another 25 years before entertainment facilities would be built in the town and even then they turned out to be on a rather less grand scale than first envisaged. .

Benjamin Ferrey's design for Sir George William Tapps Gervis marine village included an almost Monte-Carlo-like grand hotel close to the seafront, with a grand row of houses behind and an impressive row of elegant Georgian-style terraces on the East Cliff. In the plan the pier opposite



the grand development was rather rickety in comparison. The scheme as designed included places of entertainment for visitors. What was actually built were 2 small hotels, the Bath Hotel in 1838 and the Belle Vue Hotel one year later, and a single row of villas in what was to become Westover Road. What an elegant survival they would be today. But both hotels gave visitors, and a slowly increasing number of residents, a venue for holding entertainments.

The Marine Village of Bourne was established with the prime purpose of attracting visitors for sea-bathing. This was considered an effective remedy for many ailments and was the focus of fashionable society when the spas of Bath, Buxton and Malvern had become over-subscribed by all and sundry. Bathing machines are recorded by the 1830s, and the sexes were kept segregated either side of the Bourne stream as it flowed across the beach. These necessities of decorum were to persist for decades, but a letter of 1870 complained of males being less careful of their modesty, affronting the ladies walking the West Cliff paths.

Sea bathing was not a pleasure but a form of therapy to be taken, preferably early in the morning, and involved a short sharp plunge under the waves. An alternative to the sea was Hot and Cold Water Baths erected near the beach in 1840. Having undertaken their health regime in the morning, partakers were free to enjoy the remainder of the day as they wished, walking along the beach, cliff tops, exploring the heath and pine woods, or taking rides into the countryside or to nearby towns, or choosing to enjoy simple pleasures at home. The early guidebooks to Bournemouth copied the language of the inland spas to describe the facilities such as assembly room, circulating library, and reading room.

The Assembly Room was part of the Belle Vue Hotel and was a focus of much activity for concerts, entertainments and dances as well as a place of worship for various denominations. Public meetings were held there, political assemblies and many official and semi-official gatherings. Mrs. Slidle ran it and she catered for casual parties and people wanting to enjoy *'that delightful mode of recreation (. . .) a pic-nic'*. Gentlemen could play billiards. Sydenham's opened a library and reading room and for a fee of 3/6d a week or 2 guineas a year, subscribers had access to a plentiful supply of books, magazines and newspapers - although it wasn't until <sup>5th</sup> July 1858 that people could read their own local newspaper when the first edition of the *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory* was published.



The hotels were the first respectable venues for entertainments. A chamber concert was held at the Bath Hotel on 3rd August 1838, its first year of operation, and had an audience of 150 people. Miss Toomer was the manageress and she remained in charge for 21 years until she bought the rival Belle Vue and Pier Hotel as it was later to be known. From the outset the first guidebooks began to promote the area for visitors who may prefer *'the retired and quiet mode of life'*.

### **Nothing to do in Bournemouth**

Writing in the mid-19th century, Grantley Berkeley said: *'At Bournemouth, man has no amusement of any kind; and what is stranger still, when men and women meet at this watering-place, there is no association, no promenade, as at other places; and not an opportunity sought in which to exchange an idea.* These are strong words but the Honourable Grantley Berkeley, son of the Fifth Earl of Berkeley of Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire, had the Prince Regent for a godfather and it is highly likely that he was used to more exciting society. His words are quoted in Mate and Riddle's *Bournemouth 1810-1910* and a date isn't given but Berkeley wrote his memoirs in 1865, so this could be the date.

By 1850 the number of hotels had increased to 3 with the addition of the London and Commercial Inn, kept by Henry Aldridge. A number of boarding houses began to appear including Windsor Cottages, Heathfield Lodge, Bourne Villa, Willow Cottage, Eagle's Nest, Essex Cottage, Granville Cottage, Heath Villa, Rose Cottage, Sea View House, Morley House, and Clarence Cottage. Together with Richmond Terrace, the Westover Villas, a few cottages and private houses and some shops made up the entirety of Bourne-Mouth. The most important amenities for visitors carried out under the instruction of the Improvement Commissioners were the pier, opened in 1861 and the laying out of the Pleasure Grounds which opened in 1873 to be followed by the Upper and Central Gardens. They were laid out as an area for walking flanked by the Bourne stream, with other walks, trees, and flower beds, in the horticultural fashion of the time. The walks were an opportunity for people to be on display and see who else might be out walking in the rituals and etiquette of promenading. Boscombe Chine Gardens were first laid out between 1868-71 as pleasure grounds for the adjoining houses by Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, the local landowning MP for Christchurch, but during the 1880s they were transformed into a public park, together with the western section of the Chine which was leased to the Improvement Commissioners by Sir George Meyrick.



The Belle Vue Hotel continued to be a venue for all manner of public events and saw the launch of many local societies. The Victorians were enthusiastic about taking control of their world and exciting new technologies advanced their understanding. One area of fascination was the natural world, and it was one field where women could participate almost as equals to men. While it became a craze it remained an intellectual pursuit for women to collect, identify and classify flowers, sea shells and seaweeds. The guidebooks would often list the local flora and fauna and what could be found on the seashore and in Hunt's 1851 Directory of Dorsetshire George Fox is listed as a '*dealer in minerals & fossils*'. From the late 1860s onwards, groups with intellectual interests were formed, many intellectual groups were formed. Bournemouth soon had its own Meteorological Society, Natural History Society and Field Club and the Bournemouth Scientific and Antiquarian Society in 1884. Bournemouth Natural Science Society was founded in 1903.

Country sports, hunting, shooting, and fishing remained popular. It's not clear if this was for the dinner table or simply 'if it moves shoot it'. Later guidebooks extolled the great variety of birds to be found in the area, and William Hart of Christchurch could supply ready-stuffed specimens as souvenirs for the parlour at home, if the visitor was unable to bag his own.

Venturing out onto the water was something people began consider for pleasure rather than simply a means of transport. Poole and Bournemouth Regatta was held on Friday 16th August 1849 during which there were numerous races for yachts in Poole Bay attracting lots of spectators. A Regatta Ball was held at the Belle Vue Hotel, the supper and dancing continued until 4am.

The arrival of the railway, in distinct stages from the 1870s to the end of the century, together with the passing of the Bank Holiday Act 1871, meant that at first Londoners could take cheap day trips, spending up to 8 hours in 'sunny Bournemouth'. Later weekly holidaymakers headed down from the north of England, creating a demand for inexpensive accommodation. Many saw the financial benefits of the burgeoning holiday trade and leisure activities increased to cater for the thousands of temporary visitors. In providing for visitors during the winter and increasingly the summer season, Bournemouth's permanent residents enjoyed a variety of entertainments.

The provision of entertainment in middle class Bournemouth during the Victorian and Edwardian period emphasised the importance of the authority's efforts to enhance the holiday facilities, and improve and maintain the resort's high social tone by the introduction of stringent by-laws banning 'undesirable' behaviour.



After the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851, large greenhouse-type public buildings became fashionable assets for all-season resorts. Southbourne's Winter Gardens took the lead and opened in 1874, as a place to stroll indoors, for the sale of ferns, another popular craze, and holding the occasional concert. The Bournemouth Winter Garden Company was formed in 1873 with Sir Henry Drummond Wolff as the chairman. It was a commercial venture with the object of forming '*amusements, exercise, recreation, and general opportunities to the public for reading and mental and physical self-cultivation*' and opened in 1877. But it was not a commercial success and was bought by the local authority in 1893.

In 1889, the Council secured the Five Parks Act, which allowed the 425 acres of land reserved for loss of turbary rights in the 1802 Christchurch Inclosure Act, to be laid out as open spaces for public use. The first park to open was Meyrick Park on 28th November 1894. On the following day the 18-hole golf course was inaugurated, the first municipally planned golf links in the country. The other commons became King's Park, Queen's Park, Redhill Common and Seafield Gardens. Queen's Park was to contain another 18-hole golf course, whilst King's Park became the home of Bournemouth Football Club. These open spaces gave people the freedom to engage in either formal and informal activities - or none, just sitting around amongst beautiful surroundings.

Some of the mechanical inventions of the century began to filter into the world of Victorian Bournemouth. Some of the earliest photographs of the town date from about 1860 and are preserved in the Day Collection. The plate cameras were large and cumbersome so the introduction of the small Kodak box camera in 1888 made the hobby more accessible to many people. Professional photographers set up temporary studios on the beach or had mobile studios to photograph the visitors. Passing light through painted glass to view images on the wall had been available for some time, the diarist Samuel Pepys bought a lantern in 1666, but the magic lantern developed from a simple toy to having brighter lighting, extra lenses and mechanically-operated slides to produce 20ft diameter images that moved or dissolved into each other. Watching a professional magic lantern show even today is quite thrilling so it must have been miraculous to a Victorian audience. A *Lumière Cinématographe*, the first moving pictures, were shown at the Shaftesbury Hall on 14th October 1896. Before the projection of moving images, there were Mutoscopes and Kinetoscopes, more widely known as *What the Butler Saw* or penny-in-the-slot machines. Bournemouth gave licences for them as early as 1896. Licences were also given for fruit, sweets and ice-cream-sellers, especially close to the prime sites near the piers. Donkey rides

were available at 6d for ½ mile. Entertainment licences were also required for the Punch and Judy puppet shows.

The growth of mechanical vehicles added to the leisure scene of responsible adults. Cycles of various types became available, aided by better quality roads, and a Bicycle and Tricycle Club regularly held events during the last years of the 19th century. The motor car appeared just before 1900.

Churches were at the centre of much simple social activity, especially in the outlying villages. There were activities for men, women and children associated with the church and the ever-popular Sunday School outings. Sundays were a day of rest and there was no public transport on Sundays until 1912 when the trams were first permitted to run on Sunday afternoons. It wasn't until 1926 that Sunday morning tram services began.





Mutual benefit societies were set up to occupy young people usefully and improve their knowledge, especially amongst the journeymen artisans working on the increasing number of building sites usually associated with the churches. The societies were usually run in conjunction with the church and both the Congregational Church (1870) and the Presbyterian Church (1873) ran them. The earliest was the Bournemouth Institute set up in 1865 at Branksome Place, Commercial Road. The concept was to. Similar meetings were held under the Temperance Movement banner, in an effort to stem an increasing wave of drunkenness amongst working people. The churches attempted to channel youthful energies. The first Bournemouth branch of the Boys Brigade was formed in 1894 and played a major role in helping with Robert Baden-Powell's experimental camp on Brownsea Island in 1907. Bournemouth was amongst the first towns to form Boy Scout groups, and by 1909 there were several across the borough. The movement was extended to younger boys and later to girls. The young could join adults within the Red Cross and St. John Ambulance to learn and practice first aid.

Few middle-class households lacked a piano, which was the focus of recitals, sing-songs and recitations with family and guests. Pianos were available for hire from local stores and Professor Hartmann would instruct young ladies in playing and singing. People enjoyed playing board and card games. Children could play Happy Families and Snap but many of the board games were educational or aimed at fostering patriotic spirit.

Concert parties were held on the pier in the summer with entertainments provided by black-face minstrels, white men who blacked-up their faces, to the fashionable Pierrots of the 1900s onwards. These were typified by the Gay Cadets who built their own performing platform and provided songs and comic sketches to the summer visitors. Less welcome were the itinerant musicians who descended on the town.



Black and White Minstrels in 1895

Military-style brass bands were then commonplace. The Hampshire (Bournemouth) Volunteer Companies organised their own bands to accompany ceremonial events. Military bands were popular at seaside resorts and the authorities engaged the Royal Italian Band for one year in 1876 under the leadership of Signor Bertini, but played many seasons on the pier. The concerts were very successful and on Whit Monday in 1892 the band played to an audience of 24,000. The refurbished Winter Gardens opened in 1893 and Dan Godfrey's band held their first concert. This was a coup for Bournemouth, not quite what they had hoped as they offered the job first to Dan Godfrey Snr who was the best bandmaster of the day, but his son Dan Godfrey Jnr had enough



reflected glory as well as being an excellent musician himself. The band played more popular music on the pier and public gardens, and symphonic concerts at the Winter Gardens. The band was to become the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra and eventually the world-renowned Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.



## **That's Entertainment**

Going out to the theatre, cinema, concerts, and the ever-popular dances, especially at weekends, became even more fashionable after the First World War. Films were shown at many venues around the town in halls, churches and converted buildings until the first purpose-built cinema was opened in 1911 at Springbourne, named The Coronation. Harry Nash opened the Theatre Royal in Albert Road in 1882. It had a 45ft proscenium-arched stage and a 600-seater auditorium. In Boscombe, the 3000-seater Grand Theatre opened on 27th May 1895. The theatre attracted distinguished actors such as Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Sir Henry Irving. By 1905 it wanted to cater for a wider clientele and was renamed the Boscombe Hippodrome and became a music hall with more variety shows.

Bournemouth Pavilion was 87 years in the planning. Benjamin Ferrey's earliest designs included a venue for public entertainment and it was built not far from where it was originally intended. The Pavilion was to arise like a phoenix from the ashes of a building that had served Bournemouth so well, the Belle Vue Hotel. The site was acquired by the council in 1908. After much discussion about what scheme would be accepted and how much it would cost, and the interruption of the First World War, the foundation stone was laid in 1925. The wonderful brick Art Deco building finally opened on 19th March 1929. It had a dining room, a tea lounge and dance hall and a concert hall. During its 80 years it has provided a mixture of music and theatre to suit all tastes, professional, amateur, local and national, with all the big names of entertainment playing there. Many people have enjoyed dances at the Pavilion and an exciting new venture is opening in September 2010, Pavilion Dance which will offer classes, workshops and dance performances.



The opening of the Pavilion created problems for the ageing Theatre Royal. In the 1930s, it was a venue for several repertory companies that toured the country but was eventually turned into a seedy cinema and bingo hall in the 1960s. The Bournemouth Dramatic and Orchestral Club investigated building a theatre for their productions. A company under the name of the Little Theatre Club Ltd was registered and plans were drawn up. It opened as the Little Theatre on 15th June 1931 with a production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. During the late 1930s, the theatre adopted the name of the Palace Court Theatre. The 1960s saw a decline in the popularity of AmDram and the club relocated to its present in Jameson Road, Winton in 1975 above an old garage. In 2010 the company presents a new play every two months.

Both Bournemouth and Boscombe Piers had been breached for defence during the Second World War. Work to improve the facilities on Bournemouth Pier restarted after the War when both. A new



complex including a 600-seat theatre was built at the end of the pier and opened in June 1960 with a production of *Carry On Laughing*. The shows were to be a mixture of light entertainment to appear to the weekly changing holiday audience. In recent years, Bournemouth Pier Theatre has had 'one night stands' of big-name acts travelling round the country. These shows are greater attractions than the usual summer show and are popular with both visitors and residents. Boscombe Pier had its own building called the Mermaid Theatre but it was used as a skating rink when it opened in 1962 and then became an amusement arcade.

Going to *the pictures* was the most exciting event of the week for many people, from the first black and white films to the introduction of the *talkies* in 1929. English made films competed with Hollywood for glamour. Stewart Grainger, heart-throb of the 1940s and 50s lived at East Cliff Cottage at 57 Grove Road as a child and would bring his film-star wife Jean Simmons to visit his aunt. Larger and more prestigious picture palaces were built, capable of audiences of 2000 or more, the Regent in 1929, the Westover and the Lansdowne Odeon both in 1937. Across the borough, 16 cinemas in all served the local communities. Cinema going declined in the 1960s and 70s and many closed, to become Bingo Halls. Two cinemas remained in 1974 in Westover Road. A few survived as venues and the Beatles appeared at the Gaumont. But cinema going has survived the introduction of video and DVD and the multi-screen cinema at Tower Park in Poole has a choice of 19 films this week. The ABC and Odeon in Westover Road continue to cater for town centre filmgoers with multiscreen choices.

In 1995, an ambitious trial of drive-in cinema took place at Honeycombe Chine with space for nearly 200 cars looking at a huge 20 metre by 5 metre screen. *Wild River* was screened on 25<sup>th</sup> May to 130 cars. It was tried again in King's Park later that year but never repeated. What is not realised in England, and despite Bournemouth's exceptional climate, is that the success of drive-in movies in America was not only due to the weather but that in a less liberal society it was the one place where young people could go to *make-out*. Increasing sexual freedom reduced the need for them.

The first radio broadcasts began in 1922. Bournemouth had played a part in radio history when Guglielmo Marconi transmitted experimental telegraphic signals from a West Cliff house to the Isle of Wight in 1897. Bournemouth was one of the first towns to have its own local radio station. 6BM radio started broadcasting from a studio at 72 Holdenhurst Road on 17th October 1923. Listeners could hear the BBC broadcasts from London but also local features and outside broadcasts, such as organ converts from Boscombe Arcade. Tony Hancock's *Hancock's Half Hour* was one of the



great comedy programmes and the pubs used to empty when it was time for it to 'be on'. Tony Hancock was brought up in Bournemouth, firstly in Winton before moving to the Railway Hotel in Holdenhurst Road run by his parents. Another local boy, Tony Blackburn, became a national radio personality and was the first DJ on the new BBC Radio 1 station in 1967.

People didn't think that television would ever be as popular as radio. But the televised coronation of Queen Elizabeth II ended the debate. For many people their first experience of television was on 2nd June 1953 when millions of people crowded in front rooms across the country to watch history in action. The popularity of TV has followed changes in leisure activities according to the varying factors and the viewing figures will never reach those when everyone sat down to watch the Morecambe & Wise Christmas Show.

The history of popular music in the 20th century is huge. But during the Second World War what must it have been like - American troops grabbing our girls and showing them how to do the Jitterbug on the Pavilion Dance Floor? The formal ballroom dances of earlier years had been going out of fashion, as new dances accompanied new sounds. Wave after wave of the latest music and dance styles came and went on the dance floors of Bournemouth. One of the great sights in Bournemouth has been the competitors for the International Dancing Competitions streaming down the hills towards the BIC wearing theatrical make-up, men and women, and very orange tans – the following month it was 2,000 members of Inner Wheel, all grey hair and pearls. Music, too, became more available: most boys could strum a few chords on a guitar and make a half-decent sound, and so much easier to save up for than a piano. Many people dreamed of being the next big thing. This year's top of the pops turn into next year's aging rockers, or so it seems. One of the biggest changes was from live music to playing recorded music. Bournemouth was not much different to other towns here, although it did experience briefly in 1964 the clashes between gangs of Mods and Rockers but not to the same extent as Brighton or Margate. Although this quote says the battles went on for longer,

*'I was involved in two fights in Bournemouth in 1968, both were unprovoked attacks (. . .) I only escaped a real thrashing in one because one of the Rockers was also an apprentice at the same company as me. On the other occasion I was chased round the Winter Gardens theatre and through the Lower Pleasure Gardens in Bournemouth on my scooter by a bunch of Rockers on motor bikes and only escaped by using my 'local knowledge' of footpaths and alleys.'*

Names of clubs come and go. Early contenders for nightclubs would have been the *Village* and *Le Cardinal*, both in Glenfern Road, and *Whiskys* in Old Christchurch Road. Bournemouth was happy to embrace this new night culture, with hoteliers, businessmen and club owners claiming it gave a vibrant new image to the town - *A Buzzing Nightlife* - and contradicting the image of Bournemouth as *God's Waiting Room*. In 1996 Richard Carr of The Academy nightclub said that the industry generated some £15m. The former Boscombe Hippodrome is now part of the AMG Group and has been rebranded as the O2 Academy Bournemouth, joining 13 other Academy's in England and Scotland. The style of the music has changed but it is still offering live entertainment.

At first formal dining-out was the preserve of the establishment, who were used to having people cook for them. Clubs, organisations and the professions held annual dinners at the finer hotels replete with after-dinner speeches, recorded verbatim in the Observer or BVD. Less well-off people might enjoy a Sunday-school party. Women might meet to have lunch or tea in a department store restaurant or café.

The luncheon menu at the Imperial Hotel on 25th December 1939, Christmas Day, consisted of 6 courses. The menu was written in French and English

Mutton Broth
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Fried Fillet Plaiçe, Lemon Rizzotto, Chicken Liver
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Roast Prime Sirloin Beef Yorkshire Pudding Braised Ham, Spinach Cabbage, Braised Leek Roast and Boiled Potatoes
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Cold Buffet Salads: Tomato, Potato, Lettuce
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Mince Pie, Christmas Log, Blanc Mange, Tapioca Pudding, Jelly
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Cheese and Biscuits

More people began to eat as a leisure activity after taking holidays abroad became more popular and people enjoyed the continental lifestyle. Immigrants from the former British Empire arrived and brought their national cuisine with them. By 1959, the Nanking Chinese Restaurant had opened in Albert Road, and within another four years, the Taj Mahal Indian restaurant opened in Poole Road. By 1961, a food-form that was to change family-eating was the hamburger. The first Wimpy bar was part of a German company, but named after a character in the Popeye cartoon. This company was to be eclipsed by the McDonald chain which opened at 35 Old Christchurch Road in 1984 activity. Fish and chip shops are part of the British way of life and a classic seaside food. Harry Ramsden's famous chip shop opened on the seafront in 1996. But one shop



where there is always a queue is Chez Fred award-winning chip shop in Seamoor Road, Westbourne.

## Sport

Sport has been played in Bournemouth at all levels, professional and amateur. It can be something either highly structured, in teams, or by individuals or completely ad hoc. The sunny weather brings out the beach cricket, tennis or spontaneous kick about. The annual town guides mention the available sports - cricket, bowls, tennis, swimming, boating, fishing, golf and football. One of the earliest sports played was archery in 1862 in Cranborne Gardens on the Tregonwell Estate. A wonderful photo was uncovered recently of Southbourne Hockey Club in 1898 [www.flickr.com/photos/bournemouth200/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/bournemouth200/) after the images were scanned for the Streets of Bournemouth website.

In 1889, the Council secured the Five Parks Act, which provided that 425 acres of turbary commonland be laid out for general public use. Meyrick Park opened first on 28th November 1894, and the next day the 18-hole golf course was inaugurated, the first municipally planned links in the country. The other commons became King's Park, Queen's Park, Redhill Common and Seafield Gardens. Queen's Park provided another 18-hole golf course (see photograph below) when it opened in 1902.



Westover & Bournemouth Rowing Club was founded in 1865 and is a coastal-rowing club and claims to be the oldest club in Bournemouth. In 2009 the Council announced plans to redevelop the seafront and this includes the area of the clubhouse.



Dean Park was the venue for first class cricket when Hampshire County Cricket Club played in Bournemouth. The first match was against the MCC on June 28th and 29th 1897 and the last game was against Middlesex on 18th August 1992. The ground is now used by Bournemouth University Cricket Club and Minor County games by Dorset and Wiltshire. The ground is owned by the Cooper-Dean Estate. Mate and Riddle wrote in 1910 *'The ground was used for the first time for athletic sports ( . . . ) in the spring of 1871; and the first match was played on the 30th June of that year against the Artillery Officers stationed at Christchurch. Since that time it has been in constant use for cricket, football, lawn tennis, athletic sports; and also for Volunteer Inspections, Drills, Sunday School Treats, Oddfellows' and Foresters' Fetes, and various other public recreations.'*

Boscombe Football Club was founded in 1899 and was elected to the Football League in 1923 and renamed Bournemouth and Boscombe Athletic FC. The name changed again in 1971 to AFC Bournemouth and otherwise known as the *Cherries*. The club has mostly played within the old League Divisions 3 and 4, which are now known as Leagues 1 and 2. For the last few seasons the club has had ongoing financial problems and went into administration in February 2008. There have been good times, Division 3 champions in 1986-7 and defeating Manchester United in the FA Cup in January 1984, under the management of Harry Redknapp. At the end of the 2009-10 season, the club was promoted to League One.

The early years of Bournemouth Rugby Football Club, founded in 1893, seem to be marked by problems with transport.

*'It is believed that the Club first played in 1888, one of the main fixtures being Downton, the journey undertaken by horses and traps. Due to various stops en route and the state of the winding roads, the away matches were inevitably started late.'*

Finding a home venue wasn't much easier. The club was offered a pitch at Kinson Park Road, Northbourne, but they turned down the offer was as it was too far from town. The club's base today is at Bournemouth Sports Club, Chapel Gate, East Parley, near Hurn Airport and they play in the National League Division 3 South West.

For many years, the British Hardcourt Tennis Championships were held at Melville Park, the home of the West Hants Lawn Tennis Club, founded in 1926 and recognized in 2009 as one of the top six tennis locations in Britain. But the town's oldest existing tennis club is the Victoria Avenue Lawn Tennis Club set up in 1910 at Winton Recreation Ground or the Winton Pleasure Ground when it



was laid out in 1906 with a cricket pitch, tennis courts, bowling greens and a quoits court. The club moved to Victoria Avenue close to Boundary Road in 1921.

The idea for a racecourse on the site of the former airfield in Ensbury Park began in 1921. Building started in 1924 and the first race meeting was held in April 1925. There were hopes that it would become the Ascot of the South with two grandstands and stabling for 100 horses. There were good crowds but the bookies complained about the lack of bets and some members of the Council disapproved of gambling. There were a few more meetings over the next two years but the company went bust in 1928. The site was sold for housing in 1931.

## The media age

Leisure is big business in Bournemouth, for residents and for visitors. Despite the proliferation of outdoor eating spaces, or a few chairs placed outside a café, it does rain in Bournemouth and providing wet weather facilities is one priority for the Council

The site of the former Pier Approach Baths was replaced by a wet-weather venue intended for beach-users. The IMAX cinema opened in March 2002 in the Waterfront Centre providing a stunning visual experience on a vast screen measuring 19 metres by 25 metres. Only a few films were shot using the full format and such cinemas could only be sustained by showing feature films. This has been successful elsewhere and most IMAX cinemas are thriving showing the new computer animated action and fantasy films.



*The IMAX building April 2010*



From the start the building was disliked, if the cinema had been successful people may have felt less vitriolic, but the cinema closed within 3 years, and it won the most hated building of the year in a 2005 poll. The other tenants of the building appeared successful, but the restaurant on the top floor, with wonderful views across the sea, was not up to standard as a fully accessible venue because the lift was frequently out of order. Hot off the press in 2010 is the news that the Council bought the Waterfront building in February for £7m. The authority is currently seeking a compulsory purchase order to vacate some of the sub-tenants, and say *demolition will not start until summer 2011 at the earliest.*

Despite living in the media age there are gadgets we couldn't have possibly have imagined even a short while ago. Technology, beloved of Victorians, is producing ever smarter, smaller, multi-purpose mobile phones, MP3 players and cameras. People are no longer promenading through the leisure gardens but spending time on their mobile phones and avoiding bumping into each other. It is impossible to anticipate what will happen next. But the campaign to replace the IMAX with a modern leisure pool already has its own page on Facebook, one of the social networking websites.

The £3m artificial Boscombe Surf Reef is closely linked with the Boscombe Spa village regeneration scheme including the redevelopment of the pier. Like the IMAX, the reef was controversial. However, Boscombe Pier won Pier of the Year 2010 award presented by the National Piers Society, and the entrance to the pier was listed in 2004.

Bournemouth was founded on health and leisure tourism. Today people have become increasingly health-conscious as working and family lifestyles change. Almost half of the Improvement Commissioners District consisted of beach and sea. When the sun comes out, the beach suddenly turns into a hub of activity as individuals, friends, couples, and families, grab some time in the fresh air and warm sun.

Edited by Louise Perrin and based, with permission, on original research by John Cresswell

### **Additional Reading**

Lloyd, Stephen *Sir Dan Godfrey: champion of British composers* 1995

Miller, Geoffrey *The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra* 1970