

Streets of Bournemouth Society & Culture

Artists and writers came to the early town, amongst them Robert Louis Stevenson, the Shelleys and Sir Henry Irving, the famous Victorian actor. Later J.R.R. Tolkien, Cumberland Clark (author of the Bournemouth Song Book), Rupert Brooke and Bill Bryson visited or lived here.

Royalty and politicians were regular visitors to the Victorian town, including Edward VII (as Prince of Wales), Empress Eugenie, Napoleon III's widow), and William Gladstone.

Music was always an important aspect of the social life. Bands and troupes were common to Victorian resorts, but the most significant of all was the Municipal Band which became the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under the leadership of Sir Dan Godfrey.



ABOVE

The Winter Gardens

LEFT

The Municipal Band and Orchestra in 1893

Streets of
Bournemouth





SOCIETY AND CULTURE

This Theme includes the following Sub-Themes

A matter of taste

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Art in Bournemouth

Bournemouth Theatres

A matter of taste

Much has been written about notable people who came to the town in the early days. Lists of names have been compiled and added to, much of it in an attempt to override the impression that the town was only for invalids, or to acquire credibility where education and culture confirm status. Looking back over 200 years creative people have come and gone, some in what later turned out to be the final stages of illness or as a place to convalesce. Others have stayed a while before moving on leaving behind a small part of themselves in words, art, or music. Some have lived their lives here choosing to be big fish in a small pool.

Many of the names on the lists are representative of the society of the time and have been handed down but who may only be known to postgraduate students or specialists today. There are few people in Bournemouth who could quote a line from Paul Verlaine, the 19th century French poet today, although he did write two poems about Bournemouth.

Bournemouth is steeped in history and surrounded by heritage and culture. It has an increasingly diverse community who contribute their individual interests, cultures, and traditions. There is a host of groups, clubs and organisations contributing to the society and culture of the town. Culture links closely with what people choose to do in their spare time and for the lucky few their paid employment. And it's all a matter of taste

The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

The BSO has to be one of Bournemouth's best cultural ambassadors. The orchestra's contribution to the world of classical music spreads far beyond the boundaries of the town. Under the regime of principal conductor Dan Godfrey, the orchestra went from being the town band to a full symphonic orchestra, first known as the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra. It was one man's vision and Dan Godfrey had many skirmishes with the town's authorities, who probably didn't realise at the time that they wanted a first-rate orchestra.

Dan Godfrey was appointed to lead the military band and be General Manager of the Winter Gardens in 1893 and he lived in the town until his death in 1939 at the age of 71. The band consisted of 30 wind players and a drummer and several of the players were proficient in both wind and string instruments. This double-handed approach meant that musicians in the military band would provide



open air concerts on the pier. and could become a more formal ensemble for concerts of classical music. The band gave its first concert on Whit Monday 1893 at the Winter Gardens. *Dan Godfrey's Band* played from 11.30am – 1pm and there were two



further concerts later in the day. The Band and conductor wore military band uniforms and little pill-box hats. This military uniforms continued for a further 18 years when playing outside but once the orchestral concerts were established the Orchestral Band wore specially made suits. The first classical concert took place in October that year. From this small beginning Godfrey built a regular programme of symphony concerts which no other resort was able to offer, while still continuing to undertake band performances and light classical music.

In 1911 the Council created a separate military band to perform on the pier and other outside venues. Dan Godfrey was able to move forward and finally conducted the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra with a full compliment of 50 orchestral players. The battles between Godfrey and the Council were primarily about matters of musical taste, what the public wanted to hear, and the commercial concern of the orchestra needing to pay its way. The Bournemouth Municipal Choir, founded by Godfrey in 1911, sang regularly with the orchestra.

During the reign of Dan Godfrey as principal conductor he was well known for promoting the music of British composers, Edward Elgar, Hamilton Harty, Alexander Mackenzie, Hubert Parry, Charles Villiers Stanford, Ethel Smyth, Gustav Holst, Vaughan-Williams and the Australian Percy Grainger. The composers often conducted their own works and would later acknowledge the help to their careers they had been given in Bournemouth. The orchestra gave the UK premieres of major works by Richard Strauss, Camille Saint-Saëns and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Godfrey was awarded a knighthood in June 1922 for his 'services to British music'. The MSO performed at all the main musical venues in the town. First, the old glass Winter Gardens and then from 1929 the newly opened Pavilion. The period after the Pavilion opened was a difficult one for Godfrey as the public were becoming more interested in variety, dancing, music from the shows, and the new jazz coming from America. Bournemouth had its own local radio station and began broadcasting in 1923. The first concert to be broadcast was in 1927 from the Winter Gardens followed by regular concerts from the Pavilion. The concerts were heard nationally and in the case of a performance of Delius' Violin Concerto, by the composer himself in France.

Sir Dan retired on 30 September 1934 and was replaced by Richard Austin. He returned to his old rostrum in 1935 to conduct the final concert in the old Winter Gardens prior to its demolition. At the same time a portrait of the conductor had been commissioned to be painted by the artist Henry Lamb who had lived in Poole between 1922-1928 and was building a reputation as a portrait painter.



Unfortunately Godfrey and his wife did not like it and it was replaced. Thankfully the Lamb portrait was not destroyed and it is now in the collection of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum.

The last concert played before the start of the Second World War ended with the *Capriccio Espagnol* by Rimsky-Korsakov. War was declared the following day. Faced with lack of support from sections of the Council, Richard Austin resigned in April 1940 after the council reduced the number of players in the band. The orchestra, but not up to full symphonic strength, continued throughout the war conducted by Montague Birch who had been assistant director to both Godfrey and Austin. The orchestra found itself with a new conductor and a new home after the war. The venue turned out to be the new Winter Gardens on the old site. The new Winter Gardens, red-brick and solid, had opened as an indoor bowling-green in 1937. It was decided to convert it into a concert hall and by chance it had brilliant acoustics. On 18th October 1947 Rudolf Schwarz, a survivor of Nazi concentration camps was appointed Musical Director.

In 1954 the orchestra changed its name to the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. The Bournemouth Municipal Choir was re-named the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus in 1979. The BSO attracted a loyal audience with seasons of Sunday afternoon and Thursday evening concerts. In 1978 the Arts Council reorganised distribution of arts provision and its funding, with potentially serious consequences for Bournemouth. The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra was required to use the new Poole Arts Centre as its main base. Despite acquiring an international reputation, the orchestra was by then almost a stranger to its home of origin, with occasional concerts at the Pavilion and BIC, and firework-festooned extravaganzas in parks. The final concert by the BSO at the Winter Gardens was given in 2000 before the demolition of building began on 24th April 2006.



Art in Bournemouth

The Arts University College at Bournemouth

On the 1st July 2009 the Arts University of College was created. Not that it was completely brand new perhaps, just re-branded when it was permitted to award degrees for taught courses. Previously it was the Arts Institute at Bournemouth, and before that Bournemouth & Poole College of Art & Design, the Southern College of Art, the Poole School of Art, and originally the Bournemouth Municipal School of Art. The college was established in 1883 in Bournemouth and 1913 in Poole. It became a higher education institution in 2001 and as The Arts University College at Bournemouth it specialises in art, design, media and performance. 127 years of existence is a considerable achievement and evidence of the ability to adapt to changes in demand and delivery of arts education.

Arthur Lister Lobleby was the Headmaster of the Municipal Art and Technical School when it first opened in Drummond Road in Boscombe. Before that he had been the second art master under Mr Macdonald Clarke, when the art school was above Beale's Fancy Fair shop. A group of men interested in creating a Public Institute in Boscombe with an associated art school set up the East Bournemouth School of Science, Art, and Technical Instruction or as it was commonly known Drummond Road

School of Art. The School would eventually taken over by the municipal authorities and move to new college premises at the Lansdowne.

Bournemouth Arts Club

Currently celebrating a 90th birthday is the Bournemouth Arts Club. Bournemouth Arts Club was founded in 1920 and members met at the newly opened College of Art at the Lansdowne. From its inception BAC provided a focus of excellence in the visual arts. The aims of the club were to foster technical excellence and craftsmanship in members and provide an opportunity for exhibitions of work. The first exhibition was held in St Peter's Hall in 1922 and visited by 2000 people. The BAC became a regular feature of the arts scene in Bournemouth and from 1933 until 1985 BAC held annual exhibitions at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum. There were practical meetings together with talks and lecture series from leading artists. The Club was not always impressed by the topical



fashion of abstract art. BAC maintained links with the Art College not least because the painter and printmaker Leslie Ward, one of the founders of the BAC, was also an art teacher at the college. There was much cross-fertilisation between the two. This was also evident in the mostly convivial relationship with Poole & East Dorset Arts Society. In fact local artists such as Eustace Nash was a member of both clubs, and Southbourne Art Club. He supervised the BAC life classes at their studio, first at Dalkeith Steps and later at the New Gallery on Poole Hill. He also ran life classes at his own studio in Albert Road.

A feature of the exhibitions was that well-known artists from outside Poole and Bournemouth were invited to send paintings including Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland and Augustus John as well as notable local artists Lucy Kemp-Welch, Henry Lamb, living in Poole at the time, and Maxwell Armfield in Ringwood. Amongst the few home-grown notables Lucy Kemp-Welch spent most of her working life in Bushey but never seems to attain the recognition of a local girl made good. She was born at 3 Beaumont Terrace on Poole Hill.



Bournemouth Theatres

The Theatre Royal opened in Albert Road on 7th December 1882. The proprietor was Harry Nash, of the Nash family of printers and stationers, uncle of artist Eustace Nash and great uncle of Robin Nash the TV producer. The theatre cost £10,000 to build and seated 800 people in the stalls, dress circle, upper circle, pit, gallery and private boxes. Only 5 years later it was converted to a Town Hall but re-opened as a theatre in 1892 when it was refurbished using fittings from His Majesty's Theatre in London. In 1910 the new owners increased the seating capacity to 1500. The opening of the Pavilion in 1929 created problems for the ageing Theatre Royal. In the 1930s the Pavilion became the venue for the several repertory companies that toured the country. Short seasons were provided and a great advantage was being able to show current West End plays without incurring royalty payments

The Theatre Royal was renovated after suffering fire damage during the Second World War and during the 1950s was a venue for popular variety acts. In 1962 it was turned into the Curzon cinema together with a bingo club in a separate part of the building. It continued as a cinema but became the over-18s only membership Tatler Cinema Club showing pornographic films. The cinema closed in

1982 and the building has been used for a variety of nightclubs and adult clubs. There was a casino in the downstairs and the upstairs became a nightclub in 2005. The façade of the theatre is a designated listed building. It is currently painted pink and there was a notice in the local press saying that there were plans to turn it into a church for the Portuguese speaking community in Bournemouth.

The Opera House Boscombe

The story of the Grand Theatre in Boscombe has a much happier ending. It opened on 27 May 1895 and was first used as a circus but it was transformed into a 3000-seat theatre in 1899. This was a theatre where well-known actors such as Henry Irving performed. It was renamed the Boscombe Hippodrome in 1905 and catered for much wider tastes. From then until 1957 it ran as a theatre. It was bought by the Butterworth family in 1945 and they have been the owners ever since although it has been sub-let to tenants. At first it showed live provincial theatre and other shows but eventually became a ballroom. In the era of discos it was known as Tiffanys and then the Academy.



It became a listed building in 1992 even though it was in poor condition and still owned by the Butterworth family who decided to restore it. Most of the Victorian architecture was still intact including the original Victorian seats despite many years of enthusiastic disco dancing. The building has reopened as The Opera House. Interviewed BBC Radio Hampshire in 2008 John Butterworth hoped that it would become a multi-use venue for the people of Boscombe.

Bournemouth Little Theatre Club

A project started in 1919 with the idea of creating a playhouse for the growing interest in amateur dramatics. The Bournemouth Dramatic and Orchestral Club decided in June 1928 to investigate building their own theatre for their productions. A company under the name of the Little Theatre Club Ltd was registered and A. J. Seal was instructed to draw up plans. On 15th June 1931, the Little Theatre in Hinton Road was formally opened by St. John Ervine with George Stone's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Amateur dramatics suffered when TV became the main form of entertainment and the future of the Club was in doubt. In 1975 it moved to new premises in Jameson Road, Winton above a garage and created a 95-seat auditorium. Despite continuing uncertainty BLTC survives staging 6-8 productions a year. It recently became a member of the *Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain*.

Shelley Theatre

Sir Percy Florence Shelley bought Boscombe Lodge in 1849 he built a theatre in the grounds of his new estate, Boscombe Manor. When he remodelled the earlier 19th century house in the 1850s he and built a temporary private theatre in the grounds. This was replaced by a theatre added to a wing of the house in 1865-6. The theatre was for the amusement of himself and his friends but was occasionally open to the public. After the estate was sold the house was used for a variety of purposes more recently as an extension of the art college. The Shelley Manor Theatre became a listed building in 1999 following a campaign by the Friends of Shelley Manor who wanted to see it restored. The remainder of the building was to be re-used as a doctors' surgery with the remainder converted to flats.



In June 2009 the Friends of Shelley Manor heard that they were one of several Dorset projects to fall victim to South West Regional Development Agency budget cuts. The intended refurbishment of the Grade II listed Shelley Theatre was just awaiting final confirmation for £200,000 funding and it is not clear what will happen next.. The doctors' surgery opened on 14th October 2009.

Written by Louise Perrin