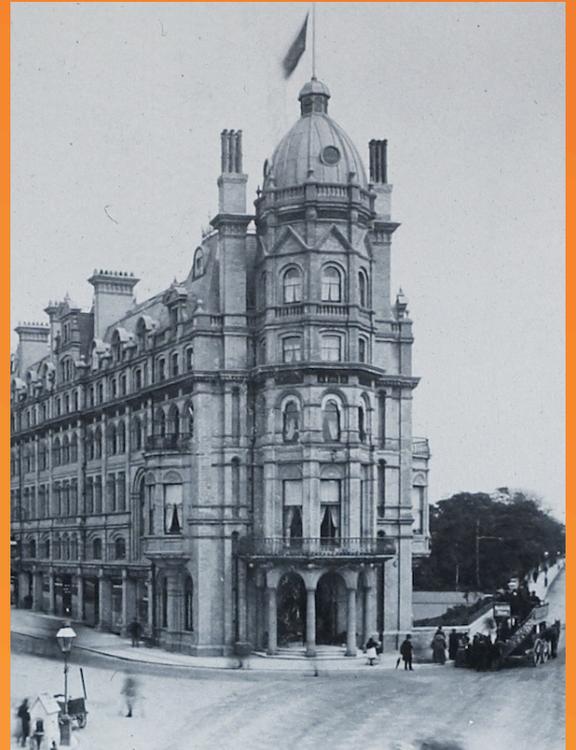


# Streets of Bournemouth Tourism & The Town

When the tiny settlement of Bourne was built, tourism had little significance as an industry. Small numbers of visitors came to visit the Tregonwells and other local people. The Bath Hotel opened in 1838 and the Belle Vue Boarding House a year later. Soon afterwards Bournemouth began to gain a reputation for its healthy climate and increasing numbers of visitors arrived usually for the warmer winters and for their health. Piers, promenades along the cliffs and walks amongst the pines were the main attractions.

With the arrival of the railway, tourism changed dramatically, as large numbers could now arrive from London and the industrial towns of the north. Hotels sprang up, especially on the West Cliff near Bournemouth West station and along the East Cliff. Wartime brought another sort of visitor as troops were based in the town, especially in the 1940s when very large numbers of American soldiers were based in local hotels just before D-Day. The opening of the Bournemouth International Centre in 1984 ensured the town could benefit from the conference trade, but most visitors still come for the sea, sun and beaches.



ABOVE

Hotel Metropole in about 1895

LEFT

Boscombe Honeycombe development in  
November 2009

Streets of  
Bournemouth





## **TOURISM & THE TOWN**

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

**The early days**

**Summer visitors**

**A holiday by the sea**

**Stagnation and regeneration**

**Tourism in the 21st Century**

### **The early days**

How many 21st century towns can say their economy is still based on their original founding industries? Shoes in Northamptonshire? Steel in Sheffield? Furniture making in High Wycombe? Car making in Coventry? Bournemouth can. Bournemouth can boast that it has one of the oldest continuous industries of any English town – 200 years of tourism – visitors coming to spend time by the sea. Tourism contributes £670 million to the Bournemouth economy today. It attracts every social and economic group and has a very important conference and trade exhibition market. Within a compact central area it has a range of quality hotels, other graded accommodation, plenty of restaurants and excellent shopping. Not least, there are the piers, seaside entertainments, and the best beach in England. Throughout its history, the town has adapted to ensure that Bournemouth remains a premier resort.

Bourne's first house was in fact a holiday home, built in 1810 for the Tregonwell family from Cranborne. This was followed by a speculative venture by Sir George Ivison Tapps to build a marine spa. Initially visitors came in the summer to sea-bathe, enjoy the quiet, and the undeveloped landscape. Bourne was not Brighton or the Riviera, and the poet Matthew Arnold wrote in 1849 to his youngest sister that '*Bournemouth on the Sea is a very stupid place; a great moorland covered with furze and low pine woods comes down to the sea-shore, and breaks down towards it in a long sweep of cliff, half sand, half mud.*'. Entertainment in Bournemouth was limited to whatever facilities could be found at the Bath or Belle Vue Hotels.

It was around this time that Bournemouth began to develop a reputation as a winter resort for affluent invalids and in particular people with respiratory disease. They didn't come to take the waters but to benefit from the clean air and mild winter climate. The infrastructure of the town developed to accommodate invalid visitors, their carers and companions and the associated service industries. Health meant wealth for the new town as it promoted health tourism.

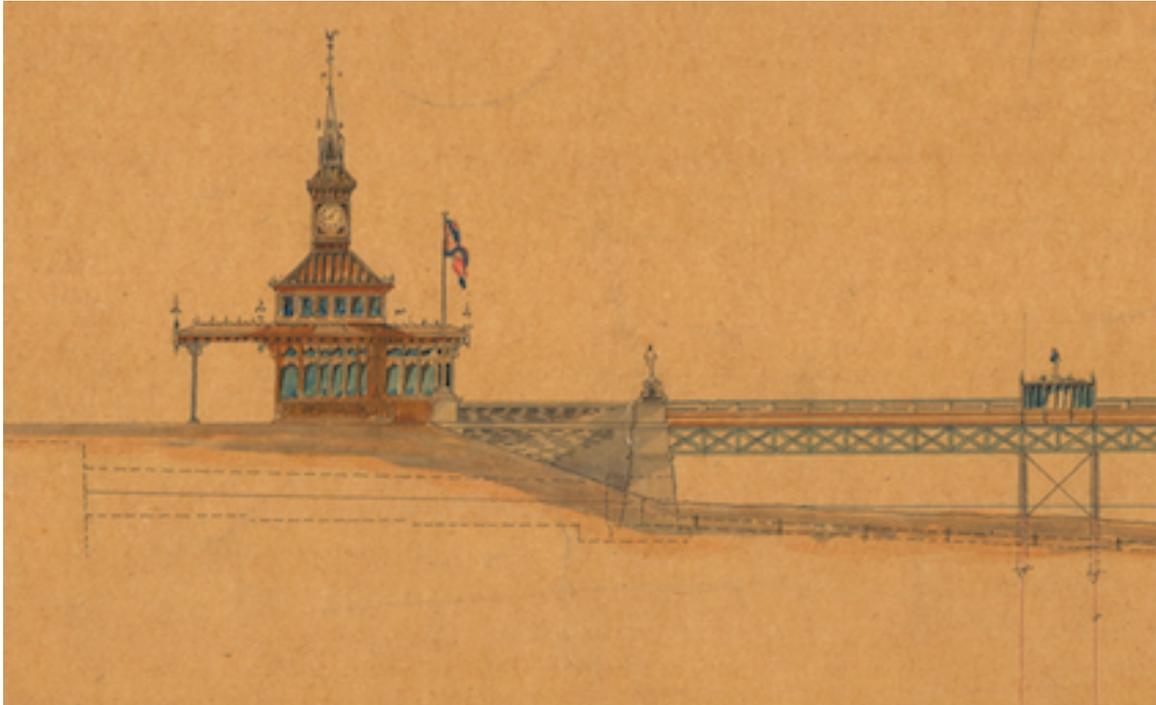


The way in which the resort advertised itself clearly reflected the clientele it wanted to attract. Because Bournemouth had little apparent history it could promote itself as somewhere different and later argue that it was superior to many other places. In his 1871 Guide to Bournemouth, Phillip Brannon writes *'Bournemouth is a name now familiar to everyone moving in the best circles of society, as that of a resort not only ranked with the most fashionable watering-places. (...) Its reputation as a winter residence and fashionable watering place is established and rapidly advancing.'*

The priority of the Improvement Commissioners when they were established in 1856 was to construct a pier. A design for a pier at Bournemouth was drafted as early as 1849 but Bournemouth's first jetty didn't open until 1856. Piers were initially conceived as landing stages to enable rowing boats to unload supplies of food and materials from larger vessels that worked the coastal trade. It was the main means of transporting goods to more remote areas before road networks were developed. But very quickly they came to be civic status symbols and essential feature for any resort competing against rivals to attract visitors. Piers were places for bands to perform, amusements and concerts, for holding civic events and ceremonies. Most important was the leisurely but socially significant activity of promenading.

The landowners and local entrepreneurs were not in complete agreement with how the pier should be built and it was left to the Improvement Commissioners to obtain the necessary parliamentary approval to proceed. As soon as they had the go-ahead, the Improvement Commissioners employed George Rennie, a renowned engineer, to design a longer pier. It opened on 17th September 1861 but its wooden piles were attacked by Teredo worm and replaced in 1866 by cast iron piles. Then just over a year later, the T-shaped landing stage was swept away in a gale. Once again the pier was repaired and remained in use until November 1876 when this too collapsed during another severe storm. It was demolished as it was now too short for the pleasure steamers to berth.

A new pier designed by the pre-eminent pier designer Eugenius Birch was completed in 1880 at a cost of £2,600. It was opened by the Lord Mayor of London on 11th August 1880.



Long piers not only went further out to sea but into deeper water allowing larger boats to set alongside. Initially it was 838 feet long, but following extensions in 1894 and 1909 it finally measured over 1000 feet. Visitors enjoyed the thrill of ‘going out to sea’ along the pier and were encouraged to breathe the sea air which was said to be stronger the further out they went. The new pier provided accommodation for 4 steamers and the Weymouth company, Cosens and Co, quickly introduced steamboat services. Competition was fierce amongst the steamboat companies but fleets of steamers, such as the Majestic, Victoria, and Empress ran day trips from Bournemouth pier to Boscombe, Ventnor, Shanklin, Weymouth, and regular trips to Brighton, Torquay, Dartmouth, Alderney, and Cherbourg.

One of the plans for the Marine Spa was the laying out of Westover Shrubberies on the earlier recommendations of both Benjamin Ferrey and Dr Granville. The sloping land on either side of the Bourne stream was mostly rough grass and the valley beneath was frequently waterlogged, and cows grazed in the meadows further inland. The gardens were developed by Decimus Burton the well-known architect and garden designer and were initially private pleasure grounds with a small yearly charge being for householders to use them. “*The brambles and*



*rubbish have been cleared away, glades formed, paths made, a turf bank enclosure fence raised along the south-western boundary, and many thousands of ornamental shrubs planted.”*

It was only later in 1859 that the Meyrick Estate granted a lease for the area to the south of the square to be developed as a *public* pleasure ground. This was when the first walks and shrubberies were laid out on the east bank of the stream including the walk that was to become known as Invalid’s Walk. In 1869 the gardens were drained and levelled which allowed new footpaths to be built on either bank of the stream and the work was completed by 1873. The meadows above the bridge were converted into the Central Gardens by Bournemouth Improvement Commissioners in 1871 while the initial improvements in the Upper Gardens were made by George Durrant prior to its acquisition as a public park. For many years the Square separated the lower and central gardens, but effectively they form a two mile walk almost to the boundary with Poole.

For some visitors to the town, the overpowering image was one dominated by invalids. As late as 1912, the writer DH Lawrence wrote to Jessie Chambers advising her *‘never to come here for a holiday. The place exists for the sick. They hide the fact as far as possible, but it’s like a huge hospital. At every turn you come across invalids being pushed or pulled along.’* And it was an image that the town would eventually choose turn its back on.

## Summer visitors

Railways changed the class structure at the English seaside resort as it enabled people to travel further, faster and at a reasonable price. The arrival of the railway in Bournemouth did not happen overnight, but developed over a period of 40 years until the town finally had a direct link to London Waterloo by 1888. An increasing number of middle-class visitors began to visit during the summer taking advantage of the improving railway service from 1870 but it was the direct link to London that began the democratisation of the resort. Summer middle class visitors stayed *en famille* in boarding houses and private hotels, while excursionists came for the day at weekends and bank holidays.



The Royal Bath Hotel 2010



By 1900 Bournemouth had become a two-season resort catering for affluent visitors and invalids in the winter and holidaymakers in the summer. Private homes were turned into hotels or boarding houses to cater for the increasing numbers of visitors. In addition to the excursionists and middle-class tourists, the town was also becoming more attractive as a place to retire, especially for people returning to England from colonies overseas. This added to the impetus for house building and increased markets for leisure facilities and commerce. There was a need for a wider range of leisure activities

One of the roles of the Improvement Commissioners was to establish the infrastructure of the developing town - lighting, streets, and sewage. In reality they were a mechanism for the promotion of the town's economy. In other resorts this was largely the responsibility of the landowners and entrepreneurs but the Commissioners took on that role in Bournemouth. In particular the Commissioners wanted to maintain the town as a resort for the elite, not simply because that was the social cachet but because they believed it was economically attractive. The Commissioners proceeded to develop facilities which would continue to attract the right sort of people. This meant investing in a range and quality of entertainments befitting a resort which would rival not merely the English resorts but also those of the Continent, especially the French Riviera.

#### The Winter Gardens

Throughout the 1870s both authorities and private enterprise in many seaside resorts around England were concerned with how to provide a suitable venue for social gatherings, concerts, exhibitions and places to shelter from the weather. In Bournemouth, the Belle Vue Hotel and a small number of other venues were no longer suitable for the increasing number of visitors and residents. But before Bournemouth could make a decision, its smaller neighbour and rival at Southbourne-by-Sea had established the South Bourne Winter and Summer Gardens Company in 1871. The glass and iron winter gardens were opened in 1874. The chief instigators were Dr Thomas Compton and Peter Tuck. It proved popular and soon buses were running from Bournemouth town centre. However it was not a financial success and the company was wound up in 1883.

Bournemouth's Winter Gardens opened in 1877 following the formation of a limited liability company. It was not a successful venture, opening and closing several times between 1877



and 1893 when the Borough finally took over the management of the building and converted into a concert hall. The large glass pavilion was built in the grounds of Cranborne Gardens, originally part of the Tregonwell Estate but by 1893 was owned by Robert Kerley.

### The Undercliff Drive

The first proposal to construct an undercliff drive came in 1878. In 1896 Capt. James Hartley, a former chairman of the Commissioners, said that an undercliff drive was *'about all that was necessary to place Bournemouth in the very front rank of English health resorts, and enable us to compete with the attractions of the Riviera and other places abroad'*. Like many of the projects intended to add to Bournemouth's prestige, there was considerable local debate for and against. The decision to proceed would be further complicated by the need to negotiate with the 2 ground landlords, Sir George Meyrick and William Clapcott Dean. As the sandy beach ended at the foot of the cliffs a drive would provide a firm surface for carriages, horses and pedestrians. Christopher Crabbe Creeke, the Commissioners' Surveyor, also said it would be essential to prevent the continued erosion of the cliffs. The first section of the Undercliff Drive was opened from the pier east to Meyrick Road on 6th November 1907. Additional sections were added in stages between 1907-1932 and the Undercliff Drive was fully completed from Alum Chine to Sea Road, Southbourne in 1950.

The Bournemouth Improvement Act 1892 gave the Corporation powers which would ensure that the clean, healthy and beautiful image of the town was maintained. The Commissioners worked to ensure that the quality of the bathing waters and the general environmental quality of the resort was the highest possible. These included controlling the escape of gases from sewers by venting them through the tall cast iron stench pipes. The spaces between buildings were left and defined to maintain the garden city landscape. Garden fires were to be controlled in order to avoid irritation to sufferers from lung disease and donkeys banned from the beach.

In 1914 the Medical Officer of Health, Dr AD Edwards was able to report confidently that *'...the town has attained a standard of health and a comparative freedom from [infectious] diseases which give it a remarkable place among the large towns of the kingdom.'*



Throughout the later Victorian and Edwardian periods, the town authorities invested resources in developing and improving facilities. The pier had been maintained, followed by elegant gardens, an indoor winter garden, and an undercliff drive. Thomas Hardy was to describe Bournemouth as '*A Mediterranean lounging place on the English Channel*'. Even so it did not have a first-class entertainment venue.

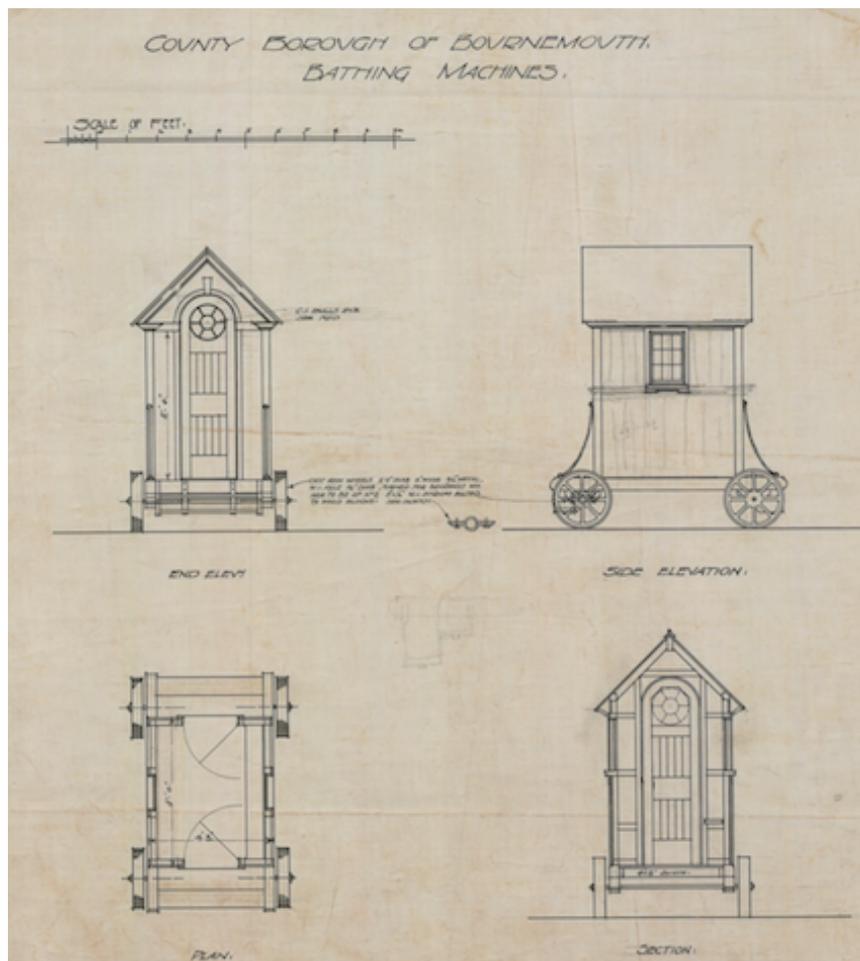
#### The Pavilion

In 1873 when the Commissioners obtained an Appropriation of Land for Public Gardens from the Meyrick Estate, included in the 15 acres was the commitment to build a public venue, but this was not to be fulfilled for another 56 years. The debate for and against building a pavilion in the town was as long and as frustrating as it had been for the Undercliff Drive. Some people thought the opening of the Winter Gardens would suffice but supporters wanted a better building especially for the increasingly prestigious Municipal Orchestra under Dan Godfrey. The campaign for a pavilion started again 1901 and the Belle Vue Hotel was acquired in 1908. Various plans were drawn up and costed, but stalemate and the First World War intervened. Further schemes were proposed after the War and dismissed but the Government granted approval in 1922 and the design put out to competition. At long last the Pavilion was opened on 19th March 1929 with a programme of music and entertainment. A concert of classical music was provided by the recently knighted Sir Dan Godfrey and the Municipal Orchestra. Popular entertainment was not forgotten and Stanley Holloway, actor, comedian and radio personality did a turn.

For 80 years the Pavilion became the regular home for West End stage shows, opera, ballet, pantomime and comedy as well as for corporate presentations and dinner dances, product launches and small conferences. The art-deco Pavilion was officially recognised as a building of architectural interest and was listed Grade II in 1998. In 2007 a £12m project began to restore the main architectural features, remove some later additions and improve much of the behind-the-scene facilities. Apparently there is to be a roof-top spa, so once again *Pulchritudo et Salubritas* has not been forgotten.

## A holiday by the sea

The little acorn of Bourne finally grew into the mighty oak of Bournemouth. The 20th century saw the town established as one of England's premier seaside resorts. Many of the features we associate with a trip to the seaside were established at the beginning of the century as better trains, greater choice of accommodation, and the ability to spend time together on the beach encouraged families to develop the annual seaside holiday habit. Swimming had finally replaced the therapeutic dipping and bathing rituals of the previous century. One of the remaining limits to family holidays was to remove the regulation against mixed bathing. Mate and Riddle wrote in 1910 *'Mixed bathing, subject to regulation, has been one of the innovations of the last few years at Bournemouth.'*





The railways and bus companies were always to the fore in advertising Bournemouth's attractiveness. Tourists were encouraged to take excursions into the surrounding countryside and towns. A 1912 guide promotes excursions that could be 'made by carriage, coach or char-a-banc to many delightful places, New forest is very popular passing the residence of Miss Bradden the well known writer and country seat of the late Sir William Harcourt.' Wimborne, Christchurch, Corfe Castle, Salisbury and Milford on Sea.

People continued to visit Bournemouth during the First World War, although the attention of both authorities and residents was preoccupied with numbers of wounded and convalescent soldiers that came to the town and the human impact of the loss of life in Flanders. Shortly after the end of the War, three of the large enclosure estates of Meyrick, Malmesbury and Cooper Dean began to be dismantled. The Meyrick Estate sold 419 lots of land in the centre of town in 1921. James Cooper Dean died in 1921 and the Estate raised the money to pay death duties by starting to sell the freeholds. The Malmesbury Estate sold all the freeholds of its estates in Bournemouth and after 1923 ceased to be a Bournemouth landlord. The Talbot Woods and Portman Estates were also sold for house building at this time. This was to sever the links with the earliest days of the town. The large houses and villas began to be turned into hotels and boarding houses. The Branksome Tower Hotel, advertising in 1930, capitalised on this and called itself '*once a fine old country seat.*' Although in Poole the Branksome Tower Estate was part of the no-mans-land that existed between Poole and Bournemouth. The hotel identified with Bournemouth as it advertised itself as The Branksome Tower Hotel, Bournemouth.

Although most professional and white-collar workers had paid holidays, many workers had no such entitlement. Nevertheless between 1925 and 1937, the proportion of workers who had some sort of paid holiday rose from 17% to 47%. The Holidays with Pay Act 1938 increased that to 60%. By the time war broke out again in 1939, annual holidays of a week or longer were well established as a part of family life

A daily Manchester to Bournemouth railway service was introduced by the London & North Western and Midland Railways in October 1910, but from 26th September 1927 it was to become known as the named passenger service, the *Pines Express*, leaving Manchester at 10am before the long journey to Bournemouth West station. An advert in the Times on 12th



July 1928 was able to quote the times of the trains. Interestingly the advert had 3 different straplines:

***Bournemouth – the foremost Health resort on the South Coast***

***The seaside town in a pine forest***

***The centre of health and sunshine***

But this was an entirely different approach to health from the previous century. It was part of the new radical world of the 1920s and 30s and the outdoors movement. Positive health meant fresh air, exercise and sun-bathing, exposing as much of the skin as possible to the beneficial rays. A suntan became the status symbol of the leisured-classes.

A distinctive feature of the time was how advertising used images of the coast. Typical posters depicted women as 'bathing belles' a young woman clad in revealing swimwear enjoying herself on the beach or in the sea. Many resorts, however, wanted to do more than simply appeal to those visitors who wanted sun, sand and fun. Bournemouth adverts show an elegant and fashionably dressed woman looking over an equally elegant and restrained Bournemouth, both of them demonstrating an image of refined leisure. In both examples, the woman forms part of the landscape, but in the first she symbolises the natural elements of sun and sea. The latter by contrast, in her poise and the way she is depicted gazing across the almost entirely artificial environment of Bournemouth emphasises that here the natural elements have been channelled entirely to serve the visitor – 'Bournemouth for health and pleasure.'

In the early years of the Second World War, Bournemouth remained much as it always had been despite the wartime restrictions. The beaches were off-limits enclosed by barbed, mines were laid, and both piers were breached. Bournemouth continued to fulfil the role as a place of relaxation. As J.B.Priestley put it in 1941 '*Nobody could call it a bad war in Bournemouth. Its front line aspect is negligible. The shops still look opulent, and thousands of well-dressed women seemed to be flitting in and out of them: in short, good time can be had by all.*' As the war progressed, and D-Day approached in 1944, conditions worsened for everyone.



The town played an important role as a centre for wounded and convalescent personnel, as it had in the First World War. In addition many families running bed & breakfast accommodation and smaller guest houses found their income from visitors replaced by payments for billeting both military and government personnel who had re-located to the town. Providing accommodation was not tourism in the true sense, but it did ensure that many small businesses were able to continue to function throughout the war. The payments were not generous

One household's accounts shows that the weekly total payment for six airmen based at RAF Bournemouth was £6 17 Shillings and 8 Pence

The first airman's lodging payment was 10 Pence and additional airmen were worth 8 Pence

Breakfast was 9 Pence  
Dinner was one Shilling  
Tea was 3 Pence and supper 5 Pence

Bournemouth was a location for the rest and recreation of American Forces. A small booklet *Furlough in Bournemouth* was published by the American Red Cross especially for those personnel recuperating in the town. Bournemouth is described as '*unique in that it combines the sophistication of a city with the gaiety of a beach town and the quiet charm of country club life*'. '*Exclusive civilian hotels*' had become '*luxuriously furnished Red Cross Clubs high on the cliffs above the ever-fascinating waters of the Channel.*' The Marsham Court and Carlton Hotels were for enlisted men, the Ambassador was for officers and the Miramar provided breakfast in bed, a complete beauty salon and single rooms for nurses, Womens' Army Corps (WACs) and American Red Cross girls. The booklet recommended Lulworth Cove, Corfe Castle and the Isle for Wight for sightseeing. One photograph showing the breached pier and beaches went so far as to suggest that if this wasn't Bournemouth it might indeed be Miami Beach, Atlantic City or Santa Monica.



Similarly the Combat Journal of the 311th Timberwolf Regiment of the 78th Lightning Division of the American Infantry describes Bournemouth as England's peacetime Miami, and encouraged soldiers to visit the pubs, theatres, and dance halls.



## **Stagnation and regeneration**

Once the war was over, the town slowly returned to the usual pattern of summer visitors. The post-war years were the peak for seaside holidays. In the early 1950s almost 70% of domestic holidays were taken by the sea. People were becoming more affluent, had more leisure time and had greater aspirations, influenced by seeing on TV and at the cinema how their counterparts in the USA were living. Continental holidays were becoming more common. Airline and ferry companies developed package holidays which were often cheaper than holidaying at home, even if it was only taking the family camping in France. The reliable sunshine, lifestyle, and attractions of the Mediterranean resorts increasingly captured a greater share of the British tourist market.

Bournemouth, like many others, began to falter as a resort. Less people were visiting, spending less money, the luxury end of the market were looking much further afield, and ordinary people were choosing to spend their hard-earned money on the coast of Spain. Many of the hotels closed at the end of September not reopening until Easter, apart from briefly at Christmas and New Year. There was a slight improvement for some in the 1960s as the small guesthouses and bed & breakfast establishments added to their income in the winter months by taking in students who were attending the degree and diploma courses at the Municipal College. The language schools also needed accommodation for their students.

The biggest and most successful response to declining visitor numbers was the establishment of a large conference centre capable of hosting party political conferences, which traditionally were held in seaside resorts. The Bournemouth International Centre was one stimulus to the resort becoming a truly all-year resort. Compared with other projects, it only took 14 years from the initial proposal to completion in 1984, and a small investment of £17million. This was considerably shorter than either the Pavilion or the Undercliff Drive.



The BIC – Bournemouth  
International Centre 2010

Further investment in the BIC took place in 1990 when the Purbeck Hall was opened at a cost of £9 million, and again in 2005 when the much larger Windsor Hall and the Solent Hall opened at a cost of £22 million. The 2005 redevelopment was controversial as the swimming pool was closed but the BIC was losing business to other conference centres with greater capacity. The development went ahead and by 2009, the BIC and the Pavilion together added about £115 million directly and indirectly to local economy.

Although the lowest occupancy rates in the late 2000s were during the winter months of January and February, the previous tendency for some establishments to close down or reduce staff began to change. Some smaller hotels did close to become residential or care homes, or were replaced by blocks of flats, sometimes providing a second home for those working in other parts of the country.



## Tourism in the 21st Century

After 200 years of seaside tourism, Bournemouth still has many of the characteristics which marked it through much of its history:

- \* 77% of all visitors in 2008 came from London, the South East, the South West and the East and West Midlands
- \* The majority of holidays were in addition to people's main holiday
- \* 28% of all holidays were short-breaks.
- \* The distance travelled by all visitors to Bournemouth has declined from 259 miles in 2006 to 169 in 2008 indicative of the increasing importance of the additional holiday/short-break market.

Surveys asking people why they come to Bournemouth recorded replies showing that 'Seaside, beaches, coast' (93%), were the main attraction/motivator in 2009, followed by 'visited before' (75%), 'countryside/natural history' (66%), 'easy to get to' (58%).

The official Bournemouth website said at the end of August 2009 *'With seven miles of golden sands and sparkling sea, the vibrant cosmopolitan town of Bournemouth has it all – a vast variety of shops, restaurants and holiday accommodation, buzzing nightlife and endless countryside with beautiful award-winning gardens and water sports galore.'* It continues *'Enjoy the sophistication, where the Continent blends effortlessly with contemporary, traditional and everything British'.*

Visitors were recommended six different activities:

- \* 'Visit the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum
- \* Do the Pier-to-Pier walk
- \* Whatever the season, enjoy an expert-guided walk through Bournemouth's many parks and gardens
- \* Enjoy high tea: the ultimate British tradition
- \* Hire a beach hut, another great British tradition, and,
- \* Get in the water!

November 2009 saw the official opening of Europe's only artificial surf reef near Boscombe

Pier. Bournemouth has an existing surfing sub-culture and the reef was expected to put Bournemouth firmly on the UK surf map. This part of Bournemouth had increasingly lacked modern facilities and there had been a number of proposals to regenerate the area. The reef forms part of the £11million Boscombe Spa Regeneration Project to revitalise the seafront area of Boscombe. It was funded through the sale of a seafront car park to Barratt Homes who built a development of 169 apartments at Honeycombe Chine. The decision to construct a surf reef also provided a stimulus for reconstruction of the 1950s Overstrand. This included new changing rooms, toilets and warm showers, the Sorted Surf Shop providing surf lessons, surfboard and kayak hire, the Urban Reef Restaurant, overlooking the reef, and 'beach pods', the modern equivalent of beach huts, to buy 'a little bit of luxury' on what the Borough was now describing as the most innovative seafront in the UK.



The Overstrand 2010

The reef at Boscombe was designed to provide what surfing-dudes describe as a Grade Five wave on a day with good swell. In contrast, the world-renowned Hawaii Pipeline is a Grade Eight. In calm weather, it would provide safe, flat conditions for families and beach users. According to Bournemouth Tourism the main market would be the short, mid-week break. The reef was expected to attract an extra 200,000 people every year and add £3m (0.12%) to annual tourism income. Concerns had been expressed, as had happened with most earlier



projects dating back to the first promenade, about changing the town's clientele, even driving some of its traditional market away and the effects upon its environment.

Bournemouth has been adept at adjusting to changing markets, although it was sometimes slow to do so. By 2009, the resort had grown into a major seaside resort, still relying on its traditional offer of sea, beaches, cliffs and gardens. However, it has diversified by adding the conference market, attracting more visitors all year round and stimulating major events such as an International Air Festival which in 2009 attracted about 1.34 million visitors over four days. Completing the surf reef was expected to further diversify the market and continue to strengthen the town's claim to be Britain's Premier Resort. Bournemouth's bi-centenary year falls during an economic depression. High profile developments are on hold such as West Central a complex of 17 restaurants and nine-screen cinema planned for the former bus station site at Exeter Road. There have been various plans to convert the former ice-rink at Westover Road, a nightclub, a casino, but the building remains empty. In the meantime the proposed ice stadium at King's Park has been delayed and may never happen.

An aerial view of South East Dorset reveals a large conurbation that includes Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch, and extending towards Wimborne and other nearby towns. The built up area is fragmented by three different authorities but to a visitor the area can appear seamless and many will have been confused by the number of signs to the *town centre* only to find themselves in a different town from the one they expected. In the past the relationship between Bournemouth and Poole was so competitive that promotional literature for each omitted mentioning the other. Now there is better recognition of the synergy between the two areas. Bournemouth is the tourist accommodation specialist within the conurbation, but it is unrealistic to consider Bournemouth in isolation. Those world-class sandy beaches stretch from Sandbanks in Poole, past Bournemouth and Boscombe to Hengistbury Head. Bournemouth arguably has a stronger and better recognised tourism image than Poole. Poole Harbour offers extensive shallow waters for wind surfing, sailing, and other water sports and recreations. The Sandbanks peninsula has the area's most exclusive beaches and holiday living, and connects the conurbation to Purbeck via the chain link ferry, a route used by many visitors.



## **Shifting sand**

The development of the Undercliff Drives, and the construction of the East and West Cliff railways in 1908, together with the extended and rebuilt pier meant that visitors could leave their hotel and walk through attractive and sheltered gardens or walk along the cliff-top with its exceptional views to the Isle of Wight and Poole Harbour and the dramatic coastline around Swanage, then stroll along the sea front.

The early Bournemouth beaches were both sandy and gravelly and depended on the steady erosion of the cliffs by gullies and by the waves. Once the promenades began to be built the cliffs became stable and vegetated ensuring that Zig-Zag cliff paths could be permanent, but this regular supply was gradually cut off and the beaches began to diminish and those places unprotected by promenades continued to be eroded by the sea cutting back the cliff top and removing roads and properties, especially at Southbourne. The town's most important tourism product began to disappear.

Seawalls were in place at Alum Chine, and from Bournemouth to Boscombe by the end of 1911. Some gaps were filled between the world wars, but the seawall only extended eastwards to Southbourne in the 1950s, mainly funded through the Coast Protection Act 1949.

At Southbourne, there were extended discussions between Bournemouth Council and the Southbourne Cliffs Association (SCA). Nine properties on Southbourne Overcliff Drive were in danger collapsing over the cliffs, but the SCA members argued vehemently against having to pay coast protection charges. By February 1954 the cost of various Works Schemes exceeded £1.5 million. As late as 1972, cliff face erosion was still occurring and the council decided to grade and drain the cliffs with further losses of cliff top land. Of the nine houses at risk in 1949, six disappeared and three remain close to the edge of the cliff.

At the far eastern end of the town, Hengistbury Head also forms an essential part of the maintenance of the tourism image. The Long Groyne was constructed in 1938 after Gordon Selfridge had sold the land to the Borough in 1930. This has helped reduce the erosion which was cutting the cliffs back by several feet a year. The headland provides not only protection to the eastern end of the whole very valuable beach, but also an open space which attracts local

visitors and tourists all year round. Perceived as *natural*, it is largely a result of human activity over millennia but especially since the mid-20th century.

Bournemouth's beach and seafront form an artificial landscape. A regularly replenished beach lies between wooden and rock groynes and is backed by a stone or concrete sea wall. The promenade above this is used by walkers, cyclists and vehicles for access. There remain a variety of mainly Edwardian structures housing toilets, cafes, beach managers' offices and first aid, separated by beach huts. The cliffs behind these structures are drained, graded, planted and often invaded by garden escapes of non-native species. This cliffscape and beach is regarded by the town as a product and yet the beach itself continues to respond to the waves as all beaches do.



The replenished beach looking eastwards towards Hengistbury Head 2009

Between 1970 and 2006, over 6 million cubic metres of sand and shingle were added to the beach. This replenishment will need to be repeated in the future as the added material is gradually moved eastwards and lost to the shore. Storms will change beach profiles in hours with swift currents picking up millions of tons of sand and material from a beach in one area



and depositing it in another where the current slows. Without the promenade and the beach, Bournemouth would have lost its most important asset

Edited by Louise Perrin and based, with permission, on original research by Vincent May and Keith Wilkes