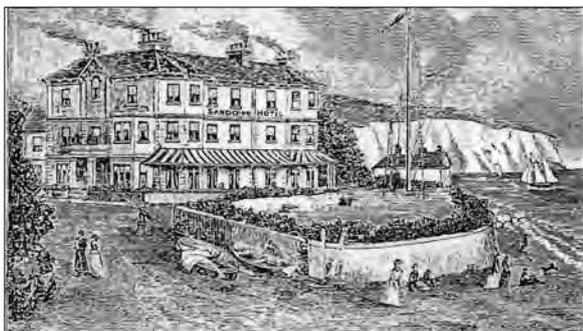


## The Eastern Pleasure Gardens

By Dave Bambrough (Part one 2007)



Deep inside the Sandown council chambers in 1911 a special committee was appointed to discuss the merits of purchasing the  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre of land immediately in front of The Sandown Hotel. The land, previously a small defence position was in fact owned by the hotel. A decision to compulsory purchase the unkempt land brought about a court case in the High Court for which the hotel was granted an injunction against the council's proposed actions. The solicitors acting on behalf of the hotel, Messrs Savage, Cooper and Everett, stated that the least the vendors were willing to accept was £750. One of their worries was that

the seaward view from the hotel rooms would be lost, therefore diminishing the attraction of the hotel for future clientele.

The special committee recommended that the council would agree to pay the sum of £843 (this sum included £75 of vendors costs in connection with the injunction) for the land inclusive of all costs and charges, on condition that the vendors gave a proper undertaking to discontinue the action, and also, subject to the consent of the Local Government Board. Only one member voted against adopting the policy, stating that he did not think the necessity of the case warranted the council laying out a significant amount of money for such a purpose. He went on to say that the spending would not stop there, as probably another £1500 would be needed for buildings, when the original intention had only been for the provision of a public convenience.

Originally the land was offered for sale at the princely sum of £1,250 with the vendors retaining all rights in connection with future developments. One member thought the money would be more wisely spent on the town drainage in Lower Sandown but the recommendation to purchase was approved, with only two voting against the proposal.

By June 20<sup>th</sup> 1912 the Local Government Board had sanctioned the application made by the Sandown Urban District Council for a loan of £855 that was required in connection with the land. The inspector of the L.G. B. visited Sandown to consult the officials only to find feelings running very high, with opponents to the scheme having hired a solicitor to present their case. However, the money was granted and the seal of the council fixed to the necessary document in reference to the purchase of the land opposite the Sandown Hotel on September 5<sup>th</sup> 1912 with the repayment set for 60 years, this being the longest period of time allowed for repayment with public works of this nature.

The document stated that the land could be used for the erection of public lavatories and other erections for public benefits in accordance with plans annexed or any approved variation thereon, under the authority of the public health act. The council were tied to the plans they had already submitted and were not allowed to build anything that took their fancy, as some people were under the impression they could. The land was building land and had fetched a building land price, but when a member asked if houses could be built there, the question remained unanswered. By now the tenant of the Sandown Hotel had surrendered all his rights to the land and the whole of the proceedings in connection with the threatened action against the council in the High Court were at an end.

On May 8<sup>th</sup> 1913 Mr H. Shalford Bidwell, M.INST.C.E. an inspector of the Local Government Board attended a further meeting to inquire into the application of the Sandown Urban Council for a further loan of £1,100 for the laying out of the land as a public garden, the erection of shelters and public conveniences thereon. There was further opposition to this proposal by a ratepayer, represented by a Mr. C.F. Hiscock, but without success.



The land, prior to purchase by the council

The land was currently in a deplorable condition but work had commenced by the enclosing of the land and the amount spent so far was £190. Further tenders accepted were, £129 19s for the shelters, £421 19s for the erection of the lavatories, £50 for turfing and £7 7s for trees and shrubs.

A protest from 250 ratepayers who thought the spending was too excessive as the amount was reaching double the original estimate, made no impression. By December 1913 tenders were received for providing and fixing seats in the shelters and the committee recommended that Mr.W.Forhead's tender of £19 18s be accepted.

Also recommended by the committee was that the rustic shelter be insured against fire with the British Crown Insurance Corporation for £75. Further recommendation included five extra automatic switches to be provided in connection with the lighting of the lavatories. Consideration of the design and estimates for the lighting of the gardens and the provision of an engine for pumping water were deferred.

By this time the amount standing from the original loan amounted to £76, £4 was already spoken for by way of the ventilator required for the toilets.



**The ornate fountain complete with lights.**

A further objection to a cost of £12 for the supplying of 12 vases for the gardens (further embellishment) was considered unnecessary by certain councillors, as even more money would be required for continually filling them. Temporary green tubs had already been supplied to sit on top of the lavatories but it had always been intended to have vases. The decision as whether to pay for vases or not was taken by vote, the result was as follows: Sir Alexander Hosie, Messrs Baylis, Harris, Flux and the Chairman were in favour of them: Messrs New, Snudden, Riddick, Pitt and Atrill against. The Chairman, having voted for the motion initially, now had the casting vote, and promptly reversed his previous decision by voting against purchasing the vases.

In early January 1914 the works committee had considered designs and estimates for the installation of an engine for pumping water to the proposed fountain and cascade, along with designs and estimates for lamp pillars for the balcony and entrance gates. Before any decision was taken a surveyor had been instructed to prepare an estimate of the probable cost of the installation of a gas engine and the annual cost of working the same. A later report recommended that a second hand 3 hp. gas engine be purchased from the gas company for £10 10s and that

the company provide and fix the necessary pump which would deliver 1,000 gallons per hour to a suitable height, at a cost of one penny per hour for the gas. Also, that the lawn was to be seeded instead of turfing. Regrettably the order for four 8ft garden seats had been delayed as four seats 6 feet in length had been sent instead. A new wall had replaced the old one, some expensive railings, together with two massive gates that had been erected at the Esplanade entrance.



During March 1914 the lavatories were opened and the Gardens were nearing completion. The special committee recommended acceptance of the offer from the Isle of Wight Electric Co. to supply and fit the fountain with 60 special lamps, complete with the necessary wiring, switches, service and cut out, for the sum of £11 18s, and to switch these on and off at the same time as the public lighting for 500 hours per annum and maintain the installation. The order for the 3 hp. gas engine was cancelled.

The final touch, which prepared the way for the opening of the Eastern Pleasure Gardens, was the filling of the fountain with goldfish, generously donated by Mr R.W. Barber, a local man.

The one outstanding matter was the question of upkeep of the grounds.

Initially it was decided that the town workmen would address the problem but in the near future a permanent gardener would be needed to take this on in conjunction with the garden near the Barrack Battery and a small plot on the Morton Common Road.

During the summer of 1914 the Sandown Band were performing regular concerts for the holiday makers enjoyment in the gardens accompanied by some unruly behaviour from local boys. The council requested that a constable be placed on duty whilst the band played, this was granted and the unruly behaviour ceased. With the First World War now in progress and public lighting reduced the council applied for an annual reduction from the Isle of Wight Electric Co., which was duly cut from £10 2/6d per annum to £6 for the period.

With cessation of hostilities the Island returned to normality and things were quiet for a few years but during the autumn of 1921, Dr Billups, (a well known local vociferous councillor at the time) once again highlighted a nuisance problem within the gardens. The children of Avenue Road "were running wild in the Gardens" he stated and nothing is being done about it. Once again the matter was referred to and dealt with by the police.

Another far more serious matter reared its ugly head at this corresponding period, which would bring fierce debate and many late hours of discussion within the chambers, plus, rebellion amongst local ratepayers. It was proposed to further develop the Gardens with the adjoining piece of land at an approximated cost of £2,400. The proposal was to lengthen the sea wall in front of the grounds for which to provide Tennis Courts and a Putting Green therein. (Sandham Recreation Grounds had not yet been conceived). (To be continued).

## 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).

## The Eastern Pleasure Gardens

By Dave Bambrough (Part three)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



Extensive alterations taking place in March 2000.



No more the beautiful Eastern Gardens in 2007.