

# THE SANDOWN AMUSEMENT ARCADES

By Dave Bambrough 2013 (part one)



The game of 'Bubbles' on Sandown Seafront in summer 1924.

The idea for an "Amusement Park" in Culver Road was initiated by one Mrs Gertrude Emma Taylor, married for 45 years with 10 children (this may have been exaggeration to suit the moment, as only two of her off spring attended her funeral) and a resident of Shanklin. A late challenge for someone not exactly in their prime of life, without doubt a lady of visionary qualities.

A property owner in Surrey before moving to the Island, she also owned East Cliff Social Club, a Café in Shanklin and lived in a large house named La Turbie, Culver Road, Shanklin.

Previous to Amusement Arcades an early form of light amusement for holidaymakers came by way of a game named "Bubbles". Site competition for this was by way of tenders to the local Council as portrayed in the November 1924 caption. The game, a simple one, with several competing players were required to catch 3 ping pong type balls in a net on the end of a long stick, the first player to do so won a prize.

The proposed first amusement site in Sandown had formerly been home to Sandown Coastguard

Boathouse.

(Kelly's 1924/5 Isle of Wight directories listed it as "in operation" with Joseph Butterfield the Chief Officer in charge). The Coast Guard Station stood on land later occupied by "Dragonetti's" hot dog

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CULVER ROAD.  
Proprietor: J. H. TAYLOR. Phone 226.

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TO LET (Complete with Linen).  
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No Cooking of any description allowed in the Huts.  
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MEALS MAY BE OBTAINED IN RESTAURANT BELOW.  
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**"BUBBLES"**  
Mr. E. Graham Robinson, of 2 George street, applied for permission to run the game of "Bubbles" on the same pitch as last season offering £20 annual rental for one, two or three years. It was decided to grant the licence provided £25 is paid for the pitch and the Council are satisfied that Mr. Cracknell, in whose name it was taken last season, no longer requires it.  
**November 1924**

stall, (for those that remember) adjacent to this stood the seven Coast Guard cottages, which were in turn adjacent to the Boathouse, which occupied the land the Amusement Park was to be built on. If Kelly's directory is correct Coast Guard operations ceased from there that year and the land was up for sale.

Mrs Taylor showed immediate interest. She acquired land fronting Culver Road including the Coast Guard area, from the end cottage to the junction with Fort Street.

Her plan was the erection of a Concert Hall with a large stage, also to include provision for a Café, Amusements, a series of Kiosks for covered attractions and a line of summer dwellings above, (described as Bungalows/Cubby's at the time) overlooking the sea. This was to be a costly venture. Sandown

had nothing to compare with this suggested radical form of amusement, so would the Council endorse it? Not without much debate. Minutes of the Council's Work's Committee showed that at two separate meetings they unanimously disapproved of the idea. The problem was the building line; the plans showed that the intended layout would project far beyond the accepted limitation. As usual there was immediate discord within the Council ranks. Certain members objected, as they considered that if erected it would block out the view of their recently opened Sandham Grounds,

even distracting custom from it. In addition, loss of views of the Downs from Culver Road were also considered enough to reject the proposal.

Fortunately however some members welcomed the idea. It was felt, by some, that Sandown needed attractions in order to entertain the ever-increasing number of visitors arriving and if for no other reason to counteract their daily departure to Shanklin for entertainment. The building line was set at 6 feet within the boundary wall but the plans showed that the buildings would project 6 feet beyond this. At this time the stone wall stretched as far as Fort Street without a pedestrian



Resembling a V1 rocket starting ramp it was actually the ramp for launching Sandown Lifeboats in Culver Road.

pavement to the standard expected today. It then transpired that the building line should have been 9 feet within the wall, incurring immediate response from opposing members wanting this amended. There was even suggestions that Mrs Taylor had bribed the surveyor to reduce it by 3

feet. Then the subject of the Bungalows/Cubby's that were to be built above the Park; *would they encourage immorality with people wanting to stay for one night?* Mrs Taylor adamantly refuted this suggestion.

Plans for the Amusement Park had been debated and turned down by Sandown Council for sometime prior to many requested amendments agreed to by Mrs Taylor. Agreement was eventually reached with approval, but not without further pedantry. The amended plans submitted in March 1926 included, Shops, the Cubby's, a temporary stand for Skee-ball a Concert Hall and the conversion of the old Coastguard Boathouse into a dwelling house.

Approval was granted on the premise that the buildings would be built six feet within the wall, which enclosed the land adjoining the old Coastguard Station. However, once the wooden framework was up it was noticed that the first floor stood out on a level with the wall and that the builders had also transgressed 10 feet further eastwards than the plans allowed. A fresh meeting was called by the Council to discuss the indiscretions with the vote once again in the affirmative.

There was further difficulty with Mrs Taylor over drainage. The drain to be laid across Fort Street would be near the surface but on inspection of the plans it showed she had conformed to accepted regulations. She was also accused of writing abusive letters to the Council. She basically told the Council that if her plans complied with council regulations she could start building and there was little they could do about it. She also wrote to the effect that she

would like a "scrap" with them, as it was good fun. Adding, that she had recently lost £300 in a casino in Monte Carlo and scrapping with the Council was even more fun than that. Summing up, she added that she was old enough to be the mother of the Chairman, would not let quarrels with him get her down, so would he please get on and do his duty. (Obviously not a lady to take lightly, usually it seems winning the day against formidable opposition). Mrs Taylor did not have it all her own way however as two buildings erected by her at the Amusement Park were ordered to be taken down by the Council as they were not compliant with the agreed plans.

**The Amusement Park,**  
CULVER ROAD, SANDOWN,  
Is now OPEN FOR THE SEASON  
With the Newest Games and Attractions,  
INCLUDING THE  
**New Gaiety Dance Hall**  
WITH THE  
**IDEAL BAND, of Bembridge.**  
DANCES EVERY FRIDAY until the 1st JULY.  
Admission 1/6.  
Watch for Future Notices.  
July 1927 advert for the dancing.

The Amusement Park opened at Whitsun 1926, but closed for a while whilst further problems were ironed out. There was an interesting mix of entertainments: many unexplainable i.e. Strad-lla (involving darts being thrown on a revolving table) Skid-ball, Basketball, Bubbles, Billiards, Balloon bursting by football and kiddies round-a-bouts. Stalls for the selling of ice cream, sweets etc. Mrs Taylor also installed an eight valve Marconi Wireless Set, reputed to be the most powerful of its kind in the Land at the time. This could be heard along the beach and throughout the town, apparently not to everyone's liking.

The old Coastguard Station Boathouse was converted into a restaurant and tearoom. This was open to the public every afternoon and evening, fronted with a sea view. The dancing

area, with a specially built floor was open for dancing free of charge, but temporarily, in the open air. Collections at dances were made in aid of the I. W. County Hospital at Ryde. The Council had requested that an entrance fee be charged for dancing and a separate entrance provided. The Council also queried the legality of one of her vending machines. Her reply was that she had received a letter from Scotland Yard agreeing that it was. In reality it was a type written copy of a letter purported to have been written by the Chief Constable of Southend.

This tranquil agreement betwixt the Council and Mrs Taylor lasted only briefly when a week later her application for music and dancing license was revoked by the Isle of Wight County Bench. Sandown Council having brought the case against her then applied for a dancing license for the Sandham Grounds, which was approved.

One month later her music license was renewed before I. W. County Bench at Newport, although once again opposed by the Sandown Town Council. She secured the license for the remaining six weeks of the 1926 season having previously held a license for 14 days on the understanding that the Marconi Wireless volume must be lowered so as not to cause a public nuisance to the surrounding area. Even with the volume reduced the Council insinuated that it was now even more offensive than before as it had become a dull droning noise.

The Wireless loud speaker generating the music was placed on the balcony above the Amusement Park in order to project the sound for a long distance. In the mornings the horn was moved to face the seashore and could be heard so loudly at the Pier Head (allegedly) that it completely drowned out the resident Orchestra at the Ballroom. The subtle reason behind the increased decibels was not simply for the daily dancing but in the hope that it would attract custom from a far off distance. (To be continued)



## THE SANDOWN AMUSEMENT ARCADES

By Dave Bambrough 2013 (part two)

The Council inferred that the music could be heard as far off as the Pier, the Town Hall, Morton Manor and Yaverland. On winning the day, Mr C. F. Hiscock who represented Mrs Taylor made one final comment to the Bench "Sandown is waking up".



The Bungalows/Cubby's above the amusement area, which commanded a wonderful view over the sea could be leased, furnished or unfurnished for the season or shorter periods for a charge of two guineas per week. By summer 1927 the place was

in full swing, and Mrs Taylor was receiving very complementary reviews regarding her dancing nights.

The dancing room was named the "Gaiety Dance Hall" enabling exponents of the "Charleston" and "Black Bottom" dances to strut their stuff. The room was adorned with artificial flowers and hundreds of multi coloured lights hung in festoons. The spacious dance floor was kept in a highly polished condition, providing dancing accommodation for several hundred people with a number of small tables placed along the sides of the hall. Refreshments were available at the Café a few steps from the hall.

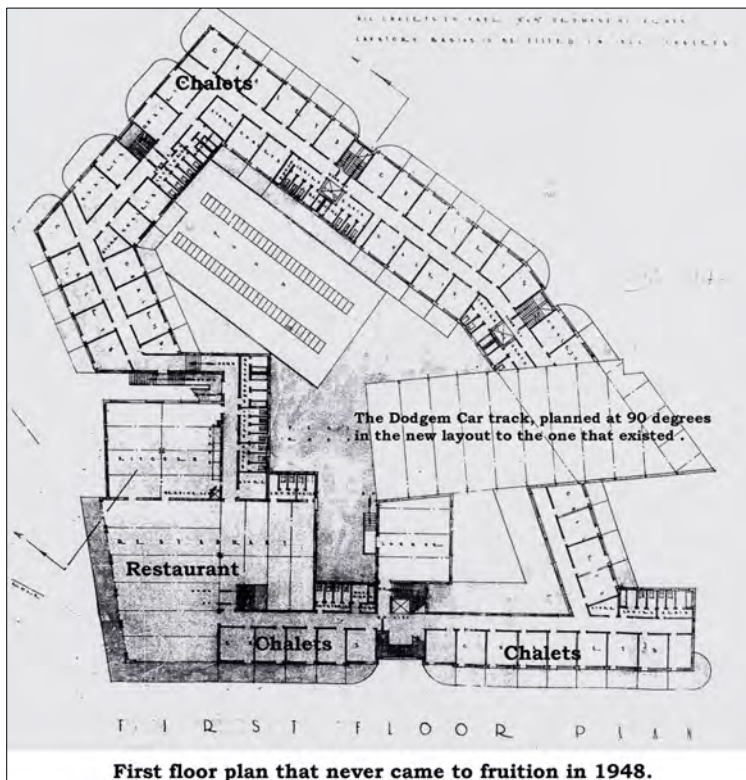


**Mr A. F. Le Maitre in the mid 1930's.**

Pavements were not commonplace in 1929 and the rough path fronting the Amusement Park was in dire need of improvement. Mrs Taylor offered land to the Council for such purposes if they would remove the stone wall still fronting the Amusement Park and build one. The Council replied that any suggestion of payment for the land was out of the question but they would comply with her offer providing the land was donated. The wall which extended from the last Coast Guard cottage to the double-gated entrance on Fort Street corner was removed and a pavement built. This, combined with improvements to the whole road,

completed in mid summer 1931 was followed by an application for upgrading it to a Class 2 road.

Mrs Taylor was a very busy woman it seems in her latter days. In December of 1933 she had plans approved for a detached house in Green Lane, Shanklin, but subject to the following conditions. That the building was set back at least 30 feet from the centre line of the road, and connection of the drains with the public sewer!! Council's have long memories.



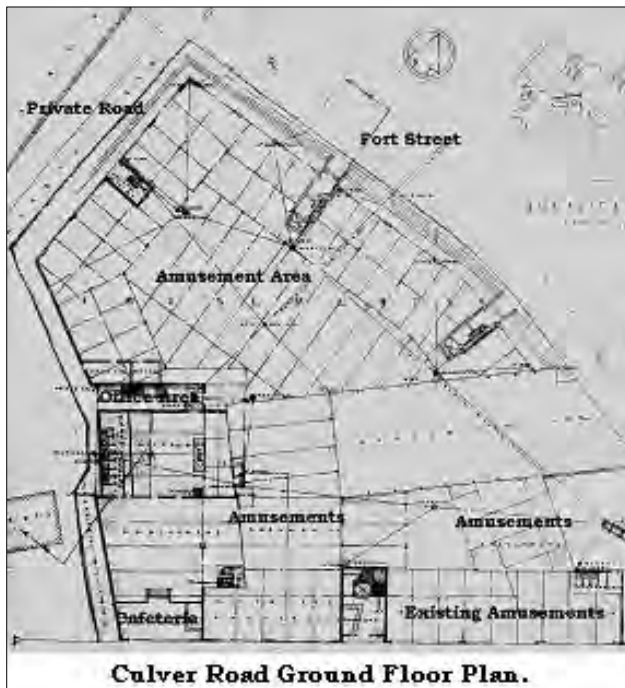
**First floor plan that never came to fruition in 1948.**

Ownership of the Amusement Park and its various popular functions throughout the period has not been established: in fact it is very confusing. Without doubt Mrs Taylor was the original owner. She leased the Dance Hall in the late 1920's, when it was renamed "The Beach Palace Ballroom" by the lessee. The name changing to "Bohemia Dance Hall" in June 1929, and finally "La" was added, creating "La Boheme Dance Hall" & Café in July 1929.

(A conundrum perhaps for future historians to explore, is regarding ownership details of The White City and the (to be featured) Regent Court Arcade. In 1930 planning permission was granted for a covered way for a Mr Chas. Marshall. In May 1938 further planning permission was granted to Mrs Taylor for an extension to the Amusement Park. On November 20<sup>th</sup> 1940 Mrs Taylor died aged 75 in

Llandudno, North Wales. However, a written comment from a passer by in September 1939 walking by the Amusement Park, quotes it as, "Chas. Marshall's" Amusements. Logical deductions would suggest that she sold out to Chas. Marshall before moving to Colwyn Bay, North Wales and subsequently to Llandudno in 1938/39. After World War 2 the Amusement Park changed name to "The White City" becoming a Limited Company, fronted by a Mr A. F. Le-Maitre (Director/owner) with official headquarters at Lancaster Chambers in Wilkes Road Sandown. {This Building was originally "The Working Man's Conservative Club", now private housing}.

The same Ltd Company also had interests in The Regent Court Arcade, which had entrances in the High Street and The Esplanade. This Arcade was registered as belonging to Chas. Marshall in Kelly's Directory of 1951 the man who appears to have been sole owner of the Amusement park pre war, pre Mr Le Maitre. Chas Marshall was certainly involved with both Arcades but remains a mystery man)?



**Culver Road Ground Floor Plan.**

When the bloodshed of World War 2 finally ended in 1945 the Amusement Park was in dire need of refurbishment. Due to blanket secrecy on press reporting during the war any coverage of local war efforts or mishaps was totally forbidden and little is known about this period.

Ranelagh Yacht Works Ltd based at Wootton, moved into the Amusement Park during the war and produced parts for the war effort. The building was converted into a small factory making pontoons and Landing Barges to assist the war effort. Damage was sustained to the building and the Coast Guard cottages when a sea mine exploded in the immediate vicinity. The subsequent damage was soon repaired and production continued.

After cessation of hostilities the Amusement Park was purchased by Mr A. F. Le Maitre who formed a limited company, with headquarters in Wilkes Road. The Amusement Park did not open in time for the 1946 season incurring an inquiry from the Council as to why? The explanation from Mr Le Maitre was accepted, no doubt highlighting the

considerable amount of refurbishment required. The Park resumed normal activities in summer 1947 with the addition of a Cartoon Cinema, which opened at 2pm, Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May 1947.

In 1948 extensive plans were drawn up to completely revolutionise the whole complex. The plans reveal a very large building extending over the whole of the land at their disposal in Culver Road and Fort Street. Whether lack of money or planning refusal scuppered the plans (as depicted) we shall never know but the drawing board was as far as the project went.

Why it was named the "White City" as opposed to the "Wight City" poses conjecture. Nothing significant happened at the London "White City Stadium" after the war, as the first post war Olympics were concentrated at Wembley Stadium and 24 other sites but not the White City?

This exciting Amusement Arcade was probably at its zenith during the 1950's and early 1960's. On approaching it from the High Street end of Culver Road (not Culver Parade then) the first building was a small café, "The "Beach Café". It was the type of café that Margaret Rutherford or Arthur Lowe of Dad's Army might well have frequented, rather quaint and homely, they don't seem to exist in that format any more, unfortunately.

Beyond the café was the first entrance to the amusement arcade. Just inside this door stood a rectangular cabinet, which housed a large sailor, and for the princely sum of one penny the dummy sailor would break into guffaws of laughter for whatever time he was set. Within, were many five-ball slot machines, a small alcove that housed wall machines and a rifle range. For 6d one fired several shots at a typical card with a bull's-eye and increasing larger circles on. The farther from the bull's-eye that the pellet hit reduced the amount of points scored. With firing complete the marksman then reeled his card in hoping he had accumulated enough points for a prize. Just beyond was a table football game. Close to this was the change box within which sat fearsome looking men (to small boys) who's job was not only handing out change that suited the machines but also keeping an eye out for local lads that had reputations of wining money from machines without investing any money first. Boys without the means to play the machines legally were prone to finding other ways of working them, usually for a small profit.

Proceeding from the first amusement area took you down a small flight of stairs where two or three Skee-Ball lanes were situated. They were several feet long with high walled circles, slightly sloped. The object was to collect as many points as possible to gain a prize. The smallest Skee-Ball circles offered the most points but were difficult to penetrate. Most balls ended up in the outer circles, not accumulating enough for a prize. These were mainly an attraction for visitors as local lads knew that the impossible could often be achieved fairly quickly but the miracle required to win on this game was never worth an investment. (To be continued)



**Skeeball M/C**



## THE SANDOWN AMUSEMENT ARCADES

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One particular machine that offered a gain without investment was the Steer-A-Ball machine. A hefty bang on the right hand side with ones fist released the large ball bearing that required guiding round the machine into the winning slot. Any lack of attention took the ball into the other hole and the penny was lost, had you paid of course. To win a penny the previous operative had to of lost his, as only one penny remained in the winning slot for recovery on winning. Subsequent pennies went straight into the main cash box collection on a lower level. A close eye was kept on players that lost!



**Steer-A-ball machine**

Throughout the whole complex there were many 5 large ball bearing ageing slot machines. The early 5 ball mechanical/electrical table machines that stood on four legs preceded the totally electronically controlled machines. Fortunately modern machines with flippers were never introduced here in the 1950's. The main difference was that the modern electrical flipper machines had a "tilt" mechanism built into them, which would not have been welcomed by local boys.

Any movement by the operator and the modern machine froze, discontinuing working. The older mechanical machines could be lifted to prolong scoring with the balls, another innovative feature used by locals in an attempt to reach a winning score. To operate the 5 ball machine required a penny placed in a horizontal slot (as depicted) to start proceedings, but a piece of *film negative* cut to suit the width of the slot would also kick start the machine just as efficiently as a penny. It had to be done when the eagled eyed attendant was handing out change or elsewhere. Inevitably in an off guarded moment a firm hand was felt on the shoulder with an order to leave the building with immediate effect for possibly the duration of that summer, unless you knew which day off that particular employee took.



Just beyond the Skee-ball lanes were the Dodgem cars, not for the faint of heart at times. Even though notices around the walls stated no bumping, especially head on, this being the very reason for most teenagers going on them. Common sense usually prevailed to avoid parents with small children but rivals were there to cause as much discomfort to one another as possible. After a warning from the man in charge if the same driver transgressed again, the cars would come to a grinding halt whilst the protagonist/s were removed from the track.

An entrance from the corner of Fort Street led immediately to an uncovered children's round-about, (as depicted below) then on entering the main covered basement area of the Arcade stood the



Electric Greyhound Racing game. (A revolutionary game for the time, purchased after the owners experienced one at Battersea Fun Fair during the Festival of Britain). There were 18 seats, corresponding with 18 numbered greyhounds (1-18). The players sat on seats and rolled a ball a few feet up a slightly angled surface over a gap on to another flat surface full of holes. (If the ball fell through the gap the greyhound did not move) The middle row of holes propelled the greyhound for two lengths, all other holes moved it one length. Locals found it to be a game of skill rather than luck. Visitors threw their ball straight up the

table, whereupon it either dropped through the gap or more often into a single movement hole. By rolling the ball against the side of the table it directed it directly to the middle row of holes whereupon the greyhound travelled two lengths of the course, not every time, but more than often. Prizes were given for 1, 2, 4 and 6 wins; the more wins the better the prize. The Greyhound prizes were housed very elegantly in glass cases beneath the tracks. The tables were all connected by 2 – 3inch high wooden slats. Even then the occasional ball from an opponents table flew over next-door giving the lucky competitor an extra movement on the Greyhound although creating added confusion whilst their ball was returned.



**An American version of a Noah's Ark.**

Friday nights were sometimes very lucrative. It was not uncommon to find visitors with either 3 or 5 winning tickets needing just one more win for the particular prize they desperately wanted to take home the next day. Negotiations with the visitor for that elusive win would bring the ambitious local entrepreneur a sum of 2/- or 2/6d, a good nights

work. It's probably worth saying that the management were very often more than impolite towards youngsters at times, when they achieved consecutive wins!! On ascending a small flight of steps you would reach the ground floor, which fronted the sea. At the top was a kiosk, which sold cigarettes, ice cream and confectionary etc. In close proximity to this was the Cartoon Cinema installed in 1947. The entrance fee was 6d, and for this, half an hour of various cartoons were shown. The main

feature of each day was a Max/Dave Fleisher 'Popeye' cartoon and should one care to; the programme could be viewed again without further charge. Entrance was also free if you nipped in discreetly through the exit door/curtains at the bottom of the cinema. Not an easy task as the projectionist had a clear view of this area.



A pre-season photograph of the Greyhound track. No prizes on view yet but a nice view of the Greyhounds, 18 in total. To the left a full compliment of Dodgem Cars awaiting their summer drivers.

Next to this was the Housey Housey game later known as Bingo. No need for coloured marker pens as the number pads had small shutters, which the player moved over to cover their number when it was called. Prizes were installed in glass cases around the playing area albeit not monetary, were very tempting to play for. In the early days the man in charge walked around with a long V shaped wooden shute which players rolled a ball down into the number area themselves.

During the 1950's the management decided to develop the spare ground at the back in Fort Street by building a strange eerie house known as Noah's Ark. Its purpose was to slightly frighten whilst also to amuse. It featured mirrors that contorted ones body into funny shapes; also the walkway flooring was set at odd angles.

Next to this stood a Helter Skelter. The Helter Skelter only lasted for about 12 months due to complaints from people living nearby. Their concern was that due to its height their privacy was under scrutiny. The locals eventually won the day and it was removed. Also in this area for the very young was a circuitous children's railway ride, named the "Peter Pan Railway". A small open aired train with individual carriages. Adjacent to

this and very close to 6 cottages (now demolished) was a motorized speedway ride. This too was removed, after complaints from the inhabitants of the cottages of the excessive noise factor.

In 1964/65 Mr Le Maitre sold the White City to a Messrs Sterling and Michaels. By 1967 the name had changed to "Las Vegas". In 1970 it closed, was then demolished and taken over by new

management.



Demolition in December 1970.

On reflection, The White City in the halcyon days of the 1940's/50's & 60's was a marvellous place for entertainment. It catered for all ages. Rides for children, adult games with decent prizes, slot machines and even a Cinema. A young film star Jean

Simmons amused herself in there during a holiday on the Island in 1947. Prior to re-building they burnt the penny-slot machines at the back of the complex and sent the remaining metal away for scrap. Whatever future development occurred after the demolition of the original building and

subsequent re opening of a new complex in 1971 is not for inclusion in this article.

Following in the footsteps of the White City came more amusement arcades, three fronting the Esplanade, not it appears appreciated by all of the residents. The accompanying letter was not the only voice of disapproval raised.

The owners of the White City also owned "The Regent Court Arcade", which was adjacent to a Café of the same name. This had entrances from the High Street (No. 58) and from the Esplanade. The Arcade ran underground with a flat forecourt at the seaward entrance. The location of this Arcade was as follows;

position yourself on either corner of Avenue Road Slipway. Then pace out 75 medium strides towards the Pier or Westward along the High Street and stop. You are now adjacent to whichever entrance you have chosen to enter the Regent Arcade or Regent Café were they still open.

(To be continued)

### Sunday Amusements

Sir,—I should be greatly obliged if you would allow me space in your paper to express what has been concerning me, and, I am sure, many other residents Cannot something be done to close the several amusement parks of Sandown on Sundays? They are a disgrace to the town, and Sandown is, because of them, deteriorating.

Yours faithfully,

Biggleswade, D. E. CASSFORD.  
19, Carter Street, Sandown



## THE SANDOWN AMUSEMENT ARCADES

By Dave Bambrough 2013 (part four)

The seaward entrance had an ice cream kiosk situated next to the steps that led to a large paved area on which a game of Housey Housey was played (fine weather only) and then into the Café or Arcade. From the High Street you accessed by way of descending steps therefore entering a basement. It did provide a shortcut from the High Street to the Esplanade or vice-versa.



**The revamped Regent Court Arcade in the 1960's.**



**Out with the old and in with the new. Modernization of the Regent Court Arcade.**

This was probably the least interesting of the four arcades for teenagers of the 1950's. It lacked the atmosphere of the other three and not having a Juke Box probably lost a lot of custom due to teenager's preference for arcades with them. Rock & Roll music developing in the mid 1950's became a big attraction for teenagers, unappreciated however by parents. Under the same management the White City chose not to acquire a Juke Box until 1960 by when the initial fervour for Rock & Roll had somewhat dimmed. However in their case, with such diverse and plentiful entertainment they probably never missed the extra profit that a Juke Box may have created in the mid 1950's. Juke Boxes were associated with teenagers that could cause trouble at times.

Many of the machines in the Regent Court were patently antiquated by the 1950's; those saved from scrapping when the place was modernised in the mid sixties, would now be worth a considerable

sum of money especially the one of a kind machines. A couple of examples of this type of machine in the Regent are described as follows; a wall machine with two Monkeys behind glass sitting at the bottom of their respective trees. Two participants were each required to place one-penny in slots and then both would wind their handles, which projected the Monkeys up their respective tree, the first one to the top won his penny back the other lost his. Nothing to win, purely for amusement only. Another large standing machine had a selection of early racing cars; Ferrari, Bugatti, Alfa Corse and Maserti amongst others, after the race, should you have backed the winner one was rewarded with a good payout. There were many more of this nature lost to the world on modernisation of the arcade. In 1963 the Arcade and Café were merged into a modern Amusements Arcade, this format lasted until the 1980's when like many other local attractions it closed its doors forever.

The second Arcade to open was at the Western End of The Esplanade adjoining the Blue Lagoon swimming pool. It opened on Saturday May 19<sup>th</sup> 1934 complete with sideshows and up-to-date automatic machines. The first to re-open after the war, in fact just eleven days after V.E. day on May 19<sup>th</sup> 1945

VISIT THE  
**NEW  
AMUSEMENT  
ARCADE**  
Adjoining the Pleasure Pool,  
**WESTERN ESPLANADE,  
Sandown.**  
where you will find all the  
**LATEST AUTOMATIC MACHINES**  
and  
**ATTRACTIVE & NOVEL GAMES**  
Which will make your Holiday more Enjoyable.  
Go **MOTOR RACING**  
on the  
**Miniature Speedway.**  
**JIGSAW**  
A Fascinating and Intriguing Game of Skill.  
Valuable Awards.  
Come & See "Bordy" on the Derby Racer.  
He will amuse you.  
Admission to the Arcade is  
**Free.**  
Advert placed in August 1934.

The ascent of several steps was required to enter this Arcade. It comprised of two long areas: the old dance hall that abutted on to the swimming pool converted to an amusement area, held mainly wall type slot machines with a few 5 ball horizontal ones. Another popular feature was a Bar Billiard (Mushroom) Table game, pictured on the next page. Adjoining this was another area, as long, with Skee-Ball lanes, a rifle range and various other games but no machines in this area.

To compete with The Gaiety Amusements (situated on Pier Street) and improve profits, in 1957 the owners purchased a Jukebox creating an alcove in which to position it. Outside the amusement hall stood a long balcony with sea views, which enabled one to watch people walk along the pavement and road below. A popular prank was to drop a halfpenny or penny behind people and watch them trying to find money they thought they had dropped!



The fourth Arcade was The Gaiety Amusements at 9a Pier Street. This one was also below ground level. The smallest of the four arcades, it boasted one prize possession, a Juke Box. The original one played 78 R.P.M. records only until 1956 when in 1957 a more modern version was installed which played 45 R.P.M. records. It was without doubt the premises biggest single money earner. Starting out in the early 1950's it came into its own in 1956 when "Rock and Roll" took over the popular music world for the teenager. The problem with the 78 R.P.M. (45 & 78 Revolutions Per Minute, i.e. the speed the record turned) Jukebox was that only the topside could be played. A request to the owner that the other side (the "B" side) would draw play time sometimes encouraged him to turn the record over at the weekend.



**An early view of The Gaiety in the late 1940's or early 1950's. The main feature then appears to be an invitation to check ones weight. Is this the reason for the empty cafe?**

One interesting feature of this Arcade was the uncompromising owner. Apart from the Jukebox there was one other iconic machine within. A wall machine named "Mick the Miller". It was a standard wall machine featuring 6 greyhounds and played by inserting 1penny. The main payout was 6 pence when "Mick" won. This only occurred occasionally, two of the other dogs paid smaller amounts, 1d and 2d. The uniqueness of this machine was that in the bottom right hand corner was a chart, which detailed the order that the greyhounds registered wins. So visitors would play the machine and unknowingly leave it when Mick the Miller was either one or two plays away from winning. The proprietor would normally stand at ground level at the entrance keeping an eye on this machine in particular. It would not matter how many three penny coins a local had boosted his Juke Box takings with, if he saw him put a penny in and collect the 6 pence winnings from the visitors bad luck at stopping a play away, the boy would receive his marching orders. So in the White City you were banned for fiddling (quite rightfully) whereas in the Gaiety you could be banned for honesty!

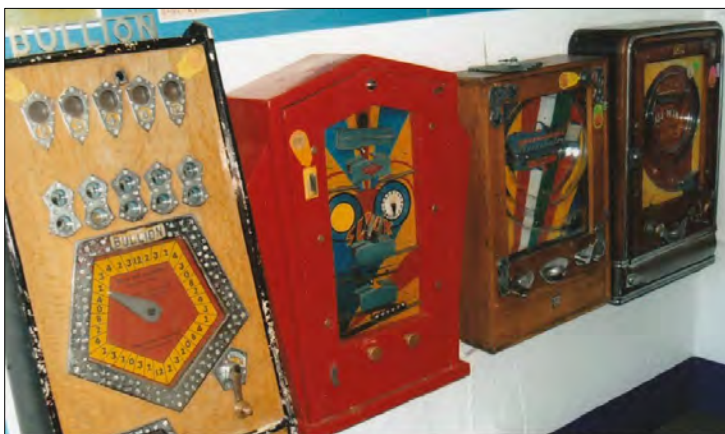
My thanks to Roy Bridger, Betty Kewell, Peggy Forward and Godfrey Tier for their assistance in compiling this article. Godfrey Tiers parents ran the White City Cartoon Cinema in the 1950's.



**Marshall's Amusements in the late 1930's. Who was Mr Marshall**



**Five Sandown lads in the West End Arcade, late 1950's. From left: Bob Heatley, Michael Pike, Michael White, Stan Bridger & Bill Wyke.**



**A typical row of wall machines of the 1950's.**



**A Bar Billiard (Mushroom) table.**