

The Winter Gardens: A brief history Part 2

1945 BROUGHT THE END of the war at last. People were exhausted, food and clothing were still rationed and money was short, but with the war finally over, people could see a different future. In 1949 the centrepiece of the first post-war Ventnor Carnival Parade was the little boat in which Island brothers Colin and Stan Smith had crossed the Atlantic earlier that year – the boat named *Nova Espero* (meaning New Hope in Esperanto).

Ventnor began to attract its usual summer visitors and in the 1950s the beach was crowded with deckchairs and sand castles again. People relished their new freedom and wanted to enjoy themselves – and the Winter Gardens was up to the task. Dick Emery's new show 'Ventnor Vanities', entertained audiences every Thursday with a brand-new act, while Petula Clark also pulled in the crowds. On Saturday nights big bands were a popular feature, with the dance floor packed and coaches bringing people from all over the island to join the crowd, which already included RAF men and women from Upper Ventnor, young people working for the season in the hotels and nurses from the Royal National Hospital – the town was full of young people enjoying themselves and looking for a partner for the evening.

In the 1960s the concert hall saw new groups like The Moody Blues and The Who. The band at the Winter Gardens one night in 1965 was The Lower Third with Davy Jones (admission 7/6d with late coaches to and from Ryde, Cowes and Newport). Davy Jones changed his name shortly afterwards to David Bowie – clearly the Winter Gardens was a great venue for emerging artists.

In 1965 the Winter Gardens received its most famous visitor when Queen Elizabeth came to Ventnor in July on her first tour of the Isle of Wight. The picture shows her casting an admiring glance at the Art Deco pavilion and acknowledging the local people crowding the balcony to see her.

But already there were problems on the horizon for Ventnor and the



Winter Gardens. Package holidays by charter jet to the Mediterranean were increasingly affordable and in 1957 the name 'Costa Blanca' was created to promote a new route to Valencia. Nine years later, in 1966, the route for visitors to Ventnor became more difficult when Ventnor station was finally closed. This was a huge blow to the town's tourist trade – why make the journey by ferry, bus and taxi to Ventnor, when you could simply fly to the Costa Blanca?

In the 1970s, as visitor numbers fell, the Winter Gardens was rebranded as 'Cascadia' for a short time. In an attempt to rival the attractions of the Mediterranean resorts, it was described as being 'Set in the heart of the Island's wonderland'.

But it was really to no avail. By the start of the new century the Council could no longer continue supporting the Winter Gardens financially. It closed in 2011, and a few months later the venue was sold for £1.

Now, once again, the future of the Winter Gardens is uncertain. But it has stood proudly

WINTER GARDENS
VENTNOR

TONIGHT
SATURDAY JULY 31st,
JOHNNY KIDD
and
THE PIRATES
Plus
DAVY JONES AND THE LOWER THIRD
And
NEIL ANDERSON

LATE COACHES to and from Ryde, Cowes, Newport.
8-11.30. Fully Licensed. Admission 7/6.

overlooking Ventnor's coast for almost 90 years, keeping Ventnor buzzing with entertainment over the decades, creating fond memories for the people of the town as well as the multitudes of tourists who have visited through the years when it could perhaps have been called the Heart of Ventnor.

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