

## Sun, Sea, Sand and Finance

On Friday 16 June 1893, Burton upon Trent took the train to Great Yarmouth. Brewers Bass, Ratcliff & Gretton were giving their employees a day at the seaside, and what a long day it was; those living in the nearby villages of Barton and Walton had to catch the 5.15 am special to make sure of their place on the excursion trains from Burton, and it was well after 3.00 am on Saturday morning before they went home. They had time and money to spend at the seaside and, by the turn of the century, resort entrepreneurs had provided all manner of pastimes to keep them happy and the entertainment companies in profit. The architecture of the entertainment building was all part of the show, designed to attract promenaders and lure them over the threshold.

The Bass excursions began in 1865 and ran annually from 1883; ten years later the numbers involved had become so great that only Blackpool, New Brighton, Scarborough and Great Yarmouth could cope with feeding and entertaining the 10,000 or so who spilled from the trains. Although Bass were famous for the scale of their outings, they were not the first to offer excursions to employees. Often to the seaside, these had been promoted by the railway companies from 1840, and had played their part in boosting the popularity of seaside resorts, many of which developed from genteel beginnings in the mid-19th century to mass market entertainment centres by the Edwardian era. Although the railway brought 80,000 to Great Yarmouth in the 1846 summer season, by which time other resorts were affected by excursionists and weekenders, seaside entertainment as a business only flourished after the 1860s. Changes in company law between 1844 and 1862, the gradual late 19th century increase in spending power among the working class, and the provision of unpaid and eventually paid holidays to workers, together produced conditions favourable to profitable seaside enterprise.

By 15 July 1904, when 17 Bass trains left Burton for New Brighton, their passengers were able to choose from a range of entertainment: the Himalaya Railway and the Water Chute; dancing in the Tower Ballroom or a variety show in the Grand Tower Theatre; even seances in the Tower Grounds. Following the pier building boom of the 1860s, pier pavilions, theatres, winter gardens and ballrooms and the more esoteric delights of observation towers and aquaria, had begun to appear at the resorts, initially in south-east England in the early 1870s and then in the north-west resorts from the late 1870s. By 1914, all but the smallest and most secluded resorts were equipped with a range of substantial entertainment buildings as well as an assortment of ephemeral variety structures, tented circuses, Punch and Judy booths and the like, which between them catered for the mass working class audience as well as the middle class market, whether day tripper, weekender or visitor.

The essentially English phenomenon of the seaside holiday produced 212 substantial new entertainment buildings in 60 resorts throughout England, Wales and the Isle of Man between 1870 and 1914. English visitors and sometimes English finance helped the entertainment business flourish in Wales and the Isle of Man, as the cities of the north-west and the north

Midlands were close by, but the English holidaymaking masses never reached Scotland. There, resort development was restricted by climate and lack of a sufficiently large mass market, and only a few resorts, of which Rothesay was the most significant, could support buildings on the English scale.

The boom in pier building at the English resorts during the 1860s was followed, mainly in the south-east in the early 1870s and the north-west later in the decade, by the opening of the first big buildings. Throughout the 1870-1914 period the resorts within the London catchment area and those of the north-west, including North Wales and the Isle of Man, were joint leaders in their provision. The West Country resorts produced a slow but steady stream from the late 1870s; so did the resorts of the north-east coast, enjoying a minor boom in cinema construction just before 1914. In East Anglia, little development occurred before 1900.

Finance for construction could be obtained locally, regionally, often from urban centres in the catchment area of the resort, or nationally. The most common means of raising capital was the incorporation of a joint stock company which, under the joint Stock Companies Act 1856, could be formed by a minimum of seven people. Liability could be limited or unlimited, but it was the advent of limited liability in 1855 which led to a boom in small share ownership, and to the formation of many resort-based entertainment companies from the 1860s. Although single shares in this type of company were often priced at £10 or £5 in the 1870s, by the 1890s £1 was the norm, as an increasing number of company flotations competed for the seaside investor's pound. 263 joint stock companies, clearly identifiable as resort-based entertainment enterprises, were registered between 1870 and 1914. Although there were undoubtedly other companies with such interests, including family businesses, private companies and partnerships, it is clear that shareholder investment in limited liability joint stock companies provided much of the capital for seaside ventures. The 263 seaside entertainment companies form only 0.2% of the 134,157 joint stock companies registered 1870-1914, but they have wider significance, as a flourishing entertainment industry was crucial to the success of the seaside holiday trade, and hence important for the prosperity of related industries including railways, brewing and manufacturing.

Forty-five joint stock seaside entertainment companies were registered in the 1870s, 41 in the 1880s and 65 in the 1890s; after a decline in the early years of the new century, the cinema produced a burst of entrepreneurial enthusiasm, and 58 entertainment companies were registered between 1900 and 1909, with a further 54 between 1910 and 1914. These varied tremendously in size and aims; one of the largest was Brighton 'Eiffel' Tower and Winter Gardens Limited, incorporated in 1891 with a nominal capital of £210,000. Its great aspirations attracted middle and upper class shareholders from Brighton and London, but it was wound up in 1892. At the other extreme was the Aberystwyth Switchback Railway and Water Chute Company of 1902, a wholly local venture with nominal capital of only £400, but which fared no better and was dissolved in 1909. Blackpool alone was the

base for 22 entertainment companies registered between 1870 and 1914, their aims including the building of a skating rink or winter garden in the 1870s, an aquarium in the 1880s, a pier, pavilion, tower, theatre and maze in the prosperous 1890s and a Picturedome, Picture Palace and Fun Shelter after the turn of the century. Smaller resorts supported fewer companies, often around 10 for towns such as Southend and Morecambe, which were close to large population centres. These companies still competed to provide the full range of seaside entertainment, however; at Southend, investors were offered the opportunity of buying shares in a Marine Palace (1879), a Tower (1897), a Revolving Tower (1898), the Kursaal (1901), Theatres (1902 and 1905), the Rinkeries and a Hippodrome (1909), a joy Wheel (1911) and Amusements (1913). Only the smallest resorts and those most distant from the urban centres, like Paignton or Weymouth, proved unattractive to entrepreneurs and were unable to support more than a handful of companies.

Records of a 10% random sample of the 263 resort-based joint stock entertainment companies show that the mean nominal capital required gradually declined from £50,000 in the 1870s to just under £11,000 by the years 1910-14, despite the incorporation of several companies in the 1890s with particularly high capital requirements. Had the 263 companies thrived and shareholders taken up all shares on offer, just over £6m would have been invested in seaside entertainments during 1870-1914. The actual figure is probably much smaller; twofifths of that 10% never traded and, of those which did, some failed to sell all their shares while others made new share issues. The picture is complex, but perhaps £2-3m was invested in seaside entertainment, mainly by individual small shareholders, in 1870-1914. Although the sum is not large in comparison with the industrial share market of the time, the investors seem generally to have constituted a different class of shareholder, those with specific interest in a resort, either as resident or past or prospective visitor.

Even those entertainment companies which did begin trading were often successful only in the short term; the mean lifespan of the 10% sample companies which traded was only 14½ years, a figure which hides frequent, long delays between the actual cessation of trading and official winding up or dissolution of the company. Several companies took over entertainment facilities from an existing company and were in turn taken over, amalgamated or re-formed; the end of a company did not necessarily imply the loss of that particular facility, although it probably meant a financial loss for the investors. It seems likely that few investors ever saw much return on their seaside shareholdings, but those who were local traders or had other financial interests in the success of a resort might have been content with the indirect benefits. Given the importance of novelty as an ingredient in successful seaside entertainments, the rapid turnover of companies is no surprise, as craze followed craze along the sea fronts.

The varied fortunes of such companies can be illustrated by three examples, all taken from the 10% sample and registered in the 1890s. Brighton Empire Limited was incorporated in June 1891, the intention being to acquire

the Oxford Music Hall in Brighton and various other properties. The company's founders were all from Brighton, and comprised two solicitors, two auctioneers, a club proprietor, a wine merchant and a gentleman of no occupation. The allotment of 18,000 £1 shares was immediately successful, with 79% taken up in Brighton, 10% in London and the remaining 11% outside the resort's catchment area. The shareholders were almost all upper and middle class, with only 5% held by skilled working class investors and another 300 shares owned by Alice Read, a barmaid at the Railway Tavern in London's Fenchurch Street. Perhaps she had come by the shares via Samuel Adams, chairman of the London-based Trocadero Theatre of Varieties Company, and one of the directors of Brighton Empire Limited. The Brighton Empire company purchased the Oxford Music Hall in August 1891 and, by the following year, the burgeoning Brighton theatre chain comprised the Oxford, the Empire, also a music hall, and the Eden Theatre, designed by Frank Matcham in 1888. An increase in nominal capital to £20,000 was agreed in 1893 but, although sales of the company's shares continued until 1896, Brighton Empire Limited was wound up in June 1898. It appears that the company was profitable for the first two to three years, but financial problems, perhaps caused by payment for the alterations made to the Oxford soon after its acquisition, brought the company down. The theatres were doubtless sold on, probably to the Brighton Oxford Theatre of Varieties Company Limited, which was incorporated in 1886.

The East Coast Mutoscope Company Limited was incorporated in May 1899. The mutoscope was one of the antecedents of the cinema, and was an individual entertainment replicating moving pictures; mutoscopes, penny slot machines, were to be found on piers or in the fledgling amusement arcades of the resorts. The mutoscope was an American invention, licensed in Britain by the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, the parent company of the East Coast concern. East Coast Mutoscope had the rights to hire out mutoscopes in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. The founders of East Coast Mutoscope were two accountants, a solicitor, an auctioneer, a stockbroker, an outfitter and, most important, John Nightingale of Great Yarmouth, described as a refreshment contractor but actually one of the resort's leading entertainment entrepreneurs. In 1901 British Mutoscope owned 82.5% of East Coast's 15,000 £1 shares, the remainder largely held by small shareholders in Great Yarmouth. In the few years around the turn of the century, when the mutoscope was popular, before real moving pictures arrived, the East Coast company seems to have been profitable; the company charged an initial £20 licence fee plus £1 per annum for those wishing to hire a mutoscope. Great Yarmouth's first purpose-built sea front cinema was erected in 1908, and from then on the mutoscope was doomed to be merely an arcade novelty. The East Coast Mutoscope Company was dissolved in February 1910.

Blackpool Pleasure Railway Syndicate was a Birmingham concern, the brainchild of consulting engineer and patent agent Alfred William Turner, who had bought the rights to the Pleasure Railway in 1893; it had been patented in England by Hermann Bormann in 1891. Turner set up his

Syndicate in July 1899, the other founder members being two engineers, a zoological gardens proprietor, a solicitor and two clerks. Solicitors' clerks were often signatories to articles of association when other backers could not be found; their contribution was normally limited to the theoretical purchase of a single share in the new company. Turner's intention seems to have been to sell £1 shares in the Syndicate, capitalised at only £3,000, to the people of Birmingham, but the enterprise was not a success. Although Birmingham was part of Blackpool's catchment area, Birmingham holidaymakers also visited West Country and north-east resorts, so investment in Blackpool entertainments would have had little attraction for many of them. The Pleasure Railway itself was also a doubtful proposition in terms of generating excitement and multiple visits; it was a pair of four layer spiral tracks connected to form a figure eight, and would perhaps have given a fairly gentle ride. Support from investors was not forthcoming and the Blackpool Pleasure Railway Syndicate never traded. Turner commented on its dissolution in August 1901 that 'Birmingham does not appear to be a good centre from which to get much interest in Sea-Side undertakings'.

Seaside entertainment companies merged, ceased to trade, were wound up or dissolved, and occasionally prospered, but the original founders often moved on to other seaside enterprises. Seaside companies were backed by local traders, hoteliers, architects and contractors, entrepreneurs with wider entertainment interests in theatre and later cinema and, particularly in the field of amusements, inventors and patent agents. If one company failed, another with similar aims might be set up in a different resort; 'company mongers' were accused of trying to obtain investment funds from residents of resorts on pretexts unlikely if not completely spurious. The series of aquaria and winter garden companies founded by Thomas Masey, the director of London's Royal Aquarium, and architect John Norton in the 1870s were partially vehicles for extracting funds from investors, although some building did take place at Great Yarmouth and Tynemouth. Weymouth, however, rejected their advances, local residents not wishing to see the £3,000 promotion fee demanded 'going into the pocket of London people' as the *Southern Times* reported in June 1876.

Other slightly shady entrepreneurial activity involved companies, often London-based, buying up likely development sites at the seaside and selling them on to local companies at a profit. The local company then took the financial risk of erecting the building. Although this might be seen as good business, at the time it caused much resentment in the resorts. The Standard Contract and Debenture Corporation and its offshoot, the London General Contract Corporation, were two such companies, both based in the Isle of Man and active in the early 1890s. The inspiration behind these Corporations was London contractor Walter Darker Pitt, who registered the Standard Contract and Debenture Corporation in the Island in July 1889. Its Manx origins were hidden from putative shareholders by an opulent London office, and it promoted 'Eiffel Tower' schemes in Blackpool, Douglas and Brighton, the Penzance and Newlyn Tramways Company, and the Marine

Drive and Suspension Bridge in Douglas. Apart from the Marine Drive, few of these plans came to fruition; although the building of a tower at Blackpool was first suggested by the Corporation, Blackpool Tower's construction was eventually wrested from its control by a local company. The Corporation profited from land speculation at the resorts, and set up subsidiary companies to secure the construction contracts for their schemes at inflated prices. The losers were the shareholders. The London General Contract Corporation set up Scarborough Winter Gardens Limited in 1892, and persuaded 88 shareholders, mainly from Yorkshire, to invest a total of £3,443. The London Corporation already owned a suitable site on the Kingscliffe Estate in Scarborough, which it intended to sell on to Scarborough Winter Gardens at a profit, but the local company collapsed in early 1893 before the deal could be done.

Although the rapid failure of so many turn of the century resort-based companies has given a scandalous air to the history of the seaside entertainment business, investors were not to be deterred, and continued to buy shares in companies offering mainstream pleasures like the cinema and theatre, as well as supporting eccentric and inventive new amusements well into the 20th century. The sea front was a happy place for inventor and entrepreneur alike, colluding in the provision of novel experiences, and some investors may have briefly profited when companies initially thrived, eventually losing only small sums. The share certificate represented the thrill of the seaside holiday, enjoyments past or to come, an investment in fun and maybe a pleasure in itself.

Building and other contractors also profited from the seaside boom. A. R. Dean & Co of Birmingham, theatre interior decorators and suppliers of seating and fittings, carried out the fibrous plasterwork at the Morecambe Victoria Pavilion (1897) and the Weymouth Pavilion Theatre (1908), both for architects Mangnall and Littlewoods. Doulton & Co of Lambeth provided terracotta for the Hastings Marine Palace (1897-99) and the Plymouth New Palace (1898), and faience for the Blackpool Winter Gardens Ballroom (1896). Both Doultons and Dean & Co were nationally known companies, but lesser known firms also fostered links with particular resorts and with architectural practices which built at the seaside. General contractors for the Blackpool Winter Gardens Ballroom were Whitehead & Son of Blackpool, who were also building contractors for the Blackpool Alhambra (1897) and Morecambe Victoria Pavilion. The Ballroom's joinery was carried out by W. A. Peters & Son of Rochdale, who were contractors for the New Brighton Tower (1897-8) and the Southport Pier Pavilion (1902); the Widnes Foundry Co was responsible for iron and steelwork on the Ballroom, the Morecambe Victoria Pavilion and Colwyn Bay Pier and Pavilion (1899). Although general building construction was often carried out by a local firm, specialities such as ceramics, fibrous plasterwork, lighting and sometimes iron and steelwork were usually contracted out to nationally known concerns.

The relationship between the residents of resorts, visitors and potential visitors, entrepreneurs, companies and their investors, architects, contractors,

inventors and other parties concerned with seaside entertainment provision was often complex. It can best be illustrated by a single resort, Morecambe, and the business activities of its entertainment companies. Morecambe is not one of England's largest seaside resorts; its population of just over 12,000 in 1911 put it thirty-second in size, well behind its nearby rival Blackpool, which then had a population of over 58,000. Its growth as a resort, originating with the small village of Poulton, began in the 1820s and was stimulated by the arrival of the North Western Railway at its terminus on the Stone Jetty in Morecambe Bay in 1848. The jetty, used for steamer services to Belfast, served as the resort's pleasure pier, one of its few entertainments apart from the Assembly Rooms until the building of the Central Pier by the Morecambe Pier Company, registered November 1867. The pier, a 912 ft long, T-shaped landing stage with no pavilion, opened on 25 March 1869. Of the Pier Company's investors, 75% were from Morecambe, Lancaster and other parts of Lancashire, and 21% from Bradford and Halifax; West Yorkshire visitors were important to Morecambe's prosperity. The Morecambe Bay Pleasure Steam Boat Company, registered 21 February 1867, was the resort's first joint stock entertainment company; just over half its investors were local (Morecambe and Lancaster) people and one third were from West Yorkshire. The investment necessary to begin entertainment provision at Morecambe was thus forthcoming both from the resort and its catchment area; development began as a joint effort for the benefit of resident and visitor, with little speculative interference from further afield.

Morecambe's first shore-based entertainment enterprise was the Summer Gardens, promoted by the Morecambe Gardens Company, registered November 1875. The Gardens, poorly situated half a mile inland from the West End of the sea front, featured a variety of entertainments which eventually included a circus, aquarium, ballroom, variety artistes, a pavilion and a racecourse. The Gardens were intended as a day-long pleasure centre for family holidaymakers, but were too distant from the sea front to succeed. Local investors may have foreseen this, as only 10% of the Gardens Company shareholders were from Morecambe or Lancaster, but the venture was initially popular in other parts of Lancashire and in West Yorkshire. The largest single shareholder, with 400 out of the 3,000 shares issued, was Henry Charles McCrea, chairman of the Blackpool Pier Company which built and ran the resort's North Pier. McCrea was an Irishman who had made his fortune as a damask manufacturer in Halifax. He began to visit Blackpool in the early 1840s and was a founder member of the Blackpool Pier Company; his investment in the resort was so influential that Halifax money surged into Blackpool and the resort became known by financiers as Halifax-by-the-Sea. Raikes Hall Gardens, the Blackpool equivalent of Morecambe's Summer Gardens, opened in 1872 with substantial financial support from local North Pier shareholders and was initially a success, although by the late 1870s new attractions on Blackpool sea front had drawn the crowds away. The offer of shares in the Morecambe Gardens Company came before Raikes Hall had gone into decline; this may explain why McCrea, a successful investor who

accumulated an estate worth over £250,000 by the time of his death in 1901, backed the Summer Gardens, a venture which local people thought unlikely to prosper. Although a financial failure, the Summer Gardens remained open, but the incorporation of the Morecambe Baths, Winter Gardens and Aquarium Company in May 1876 foreshadowed greater competition from the sea front.

The impetus for the building of the Winter Gardens came solely from Bradford. All the founder subscribers of the Baths, Winter Gardens and Aquarium Company were Bradford men: three gentlemen, a machine maker, a worsted spinner, a civil engineer and a solicitor. The share allotment was popular in Bradford and Morecambe, and the Winter Gardens, initially known as the People's Palace, opened in a prime position on the sea front in 1878. However, the Company's capital only reached just over half the £40,000 needed, and it was in difficulties by the early 1890s. It remained the sole substantial sea front pleasure building, its only competition being the Summer Gardens, under the new management of the Morecambe Summer Gardens Company since 1881. This was also a failure, as was an attempt to reconstitute the Company in 1889 as Morecambe Pavilion and Summer Gardens Limited. This latter Company had overtones of a gentlemen's speculative venture, as its shareholders came largely from London and the Home Counties as well as Morecambe.

The West Yorkshire and particularly Bradford influence became even stronger in Morecambe towards the end of the century, when the rapidly developing West End of the resort became known as Bradford-by-the-Sea or Little Bradford. Although Morecambe was essentially a working class resort, for a time it became fashionable to live in Morecambe and work in Bradford, so good were the rail links between the two. The Midland Railway, which absorbed the North Western during the 1890s, provided lavish carriages for first class passengers on the Bradford-Morecambe run.

At the start of the 1890s Morecambe could boast only a pier, the Winter Gardens and the unsuccessful Summer Gardens but, by the end of the decade, the sea front had been transformed. The opportunities offered by the town to entrepreneurs had become more widely known, and in 1892 outside investors seized the initiative for a pleasure pier, which the resort still lacked. Local people and West Yorkshire financiers were left to choose between the rival plans of businessmen from Manchester and London, who competed to be the first to offer shares in a true pleasure pier company. The Manchester enterprise, the Morecambe Alexandra Road Pier and Pavilion Company, registered December 1892, also involved Morecambe builders James Walker and John and R. Gardner but, despite this local input, the Company never traded. It had been registered almost a month after the Morecambe (Regent Road West End) Pier Company, promoted by London agent Alfred Atkins and, although both schemes were advertised in the local press, only the London-instigated scheme went ahead. It was slow to gather investment, but local people may have been encouraged to take up shares by the presence of the respected brewer, William Mitchell of Lancaster, as a large shareholder.

The West End Pier opened 6 April 1896; at its end was a large Pavilion. Competition from this pleasure pier forced the directors of the original Morecambe Pier Company to dissolve their business and reform it with an increased capital base, in order to build a Pavilion on their Central Pier, still basically a landing stage. Thus the Morecambe Pier and Pavilion Company was incorporated in February 1897. It was a combined Morecambe and West Yorkshire venture and the new Pavilion, which became known as the Taj Mahal of the North, opened later in 1897.

The financial position of the Winter Gardens had continued to decline, and a new company, the Morecambe Winter Gardens Company, was incorporated in November 1896 in order to take over the building. It was a locally based company with broad support in Lancashire and Yorkshire; its shareholders included architects John and W. H. Littlewood of the Manchester practice Mangnall & Littlewoods, who were to be architects for the Victoria Pavilion, the 1897 extension to the Winter Gardens. Also in 1896 Morecambe Grand Hotel Limited, a London and West Yorkshire enterprise, had made an offer for a site on Lord Street, adjacent to the east end of the sea front, but the company never traded.

By the mid-1890s the Summer Gardens had become an anachronism, its site clearly unsuitable for an entertainment complex. In 1897 three local men, including builders John and R. Gardner, who had been involved in the abortive 1892 Alexandra Road pier scheme, bought the Summer Gardens. Soon afterwards Morecambe Regent Park Estate Limited was set up, presumably to develop the site for housing, but the company never traded. It was intended that the Summer Gardens buildings should be demolished in 1898, but the site was left derelict until 1924 when it was bought by Morecambe Corporation and turned into a recreation ground.

By the late 1890s the Assembly Rooms, on a site slightly inland from the Central Pier, must have seemed outdated to entrepreneurs and speculators alike. The Royalty Theatre, designed by Frank Matcham and opened 4 April 1898, was built in its stead by a group of local businessmen, who almost immediately sold it on to the Morecambe Theatre Company, incorporated October 1898 and also a local concern. The Royalty had not prospered, a victim of the general depression in trade at the end of the century. Like most of Morecambe's large pleasure buildings it had been planned in more profitable times. Many investors suffered, though the town was left with an architecturally splendid collection of loss-making structures. The Morecambe Theatre Company contracted Thomas Sergenson, Blackpool's best known impresario, to manage the Royalty in an effort to increase receipts, but the Theatre Company went under before the rescue attempt could begin. The Theatre changed hands, and was taken over by the Morecambe Royalty Theatre Company in 1919.

Blackpool Tower opened in 1894, and four years later Morecambe had its own tower in the West End, one of the chain of Warwick's Revolving Towers built in English resorts around the turn of the century. Thomas Warwick, a London engineer, built and ran the Towers under licence from the

American patentees, and no local investment was involved at Morecambe. The Tower's construction proved controversial, as the Urban District Council refused to grant planning permission though it had no legal right to make this decision, and Warwick's Revolving Tower opened on 30 June 1898. However, it was taken down in 1902, another victim of the depression.

Morecambe outdid Blackpool by one in terms of Towers when the Morecambe Tower, intended as an Oriental-style entertainment centre topped by a cone-shaped tower, opened in the summer of 1900. It was a West Yorkshire venture with backing from Morecambe, Blackpool and Scarborough; the patentee of the tower and its spiral tramway was a West Yorkshireman. The Morecambe Tower Company was incorporated in October 1898 and six months later had accumulated 289 shareholders, although none owned over 1,000 of the £1 shares; typical of these small investors were Mary Ann, Frances, Elizabeth and Sarah Leigh, spinsters from the town of Leigh, near Manchester, each of whom held 300 shares. The Company was popular with shareholders throughout Lancashire and West Yorkshire, although it was never able to raise its nominal capital of £70,000. Lack of finance caused the Tower to open early and incomplete, and by 1901 the Company was in trouble; it was wound up in 1904. In 1909 the Tower Buildings were bought by the Morecambe Tower and Estates Company, formed by one of the founders of the previous Tower Company, but this concern was no more successful. The Tower was demolished during the First World War though the remaining buildings continued in various guises until 1959.

The new century saw the Morecambe Pier and Pavilion Company slip into receivership, possibly due to the cost of the new Central Pier Pavilion; the Company was dissolved in 1912 after selling its assets. The finances of the Morecambe (Regent Road West End) Pier Company were little better, but it was 1932 before the appointment of a receiver; the Company was dissolved in 1934. Morecambe's entertainment industry was not completely depressed in the early 1900s, however; the Alhambra Theatre, opposite the entrance to the West End Pier and seating 4,000, opened in April 1901, Morecambe Entertainments Limited was incorporated in 1908, possibly with the aim of running amusement arcades, and the Palace Theatre was opened in 1910.

The legacy of the largely Lancashire and West Yorkshire investment in Morecambe was a set of entertainment facilities which proved reasonably adaptable to the new tastes and requirements of 20th century leisure. The case of the piers and their pavilions is rather different, beset as they were by fire and storm (only the Central Pier remains), but the Victoria Palace, the Alhambra and the Palace Theatre still exist, the Winter Gardens functioned until demolition in 1982, as did the Tower Buildings until 1959 and the Royalty Theatre until demolition in 1957.

The new Morecambe entertainment companies of the 1890s were highly undercapitalised, with only around £59,000 being raised out of a total £274,000 required. Despite losses, small shareholders continued supporting the provision of seaside novelty and businessmen continued to try to make it profitable. Financial backing for the Central Pier was stronger than for other

facilities; its original parent company, incorporated 1867, benefited from being the first such entertainment company to build in Morecambe, attracting and keeping local capital with little competition until the 1890s. Morecambe councillors were involved with several local entertainment companies, though this by no means guaranteed success. Councillor Thomas Baxter was Chairman of the new Winter Gardens Company and a director of the West End Pier Company in the 1890s, while two councillors were behind the attempt to develop the Summer Gardens site in 1897.

Morecambe could also offer cheap outdoor entertainment. Entrepreneurs ran many stalls and rides, such as the bicycle railway near the Winter Gardens, and promenaders were treated to music from street entertainers and may have been accosted by a photographer or even a phrenologist. And there was always the sea, the reason for all this frenetic activity, ranging from high finance to oyster sellers.

It is impossible to pin the label 'typical' on any English or Welsh resort, such are the variations in topography, catchment areas, development and financing, but the pattern of activity revealed at Morecambe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is not far off, and illustrates how a resort could become a mass market entertainment centre. Of resorts in general, there was a consistent willingness on the part of small shareholders, from the resort and its catchment area, to part with money to enterprises based there, with little hope of large returns. The initiative more often came from outside the resort than within, though local architects, contractors and others with an interest in the venture were quick to jump on the bandwagon. Architects sometimes took a leading role. The seaside was a welcoming home for men with ideas, inventors with potentially money-spinning novelties, in search of backers.

Local government, particularly in the early 20th century, was also a player in the development game. Municipal support for entertainments in Bournemouth began in the 1890s, while Great Yarmouth Borough Council bought the Wellington Pier in 1900, built a Pavilion at its end in 1903 and erected a Winter Garden, bought from Torquay, beside it in 1904.

It was, however, the joint stock companies, their investors and their architects which, for the most part, provided English sea fronts with pleasure buildings between 1870 and 1914. Perhaps the exciting, colourful and idiosyncratic nature of these buildings explains the persistent desire to invest in their construction.