

The Pleasure Domes

A visitor to a large north-west seaside resort in the early 1890s might have thought every method of parting trippers from their money was in action on the beaches and promenades and all possible entertainments catered for in theatres and in halls. But just before the turn of the century, into the brash vulgarity of the north-western resorts came the ultimate in holiday experiences, the pleasure domes, where all manner of excitements could be found within one massive structure. No need to brave the windy promenade to go to the circus, the ballroom or the winter garden; all were under one roof and, important for profits, owned by one company. Given the changeable nature of resort weather, especially on the Irish Sea coast, warmth and fun could only be guaranteed at an indoor entertainments centre. Many of these magnificent piles were topped by idiosyncratic towers which acted as landmarks, and most were brilliantly decorated internally in an attempt to ensure visitors stayed inside as long as possible. The most famous and long surviving of these entertainment complexes are at Blackpool but, though they flourished in the north-west in the era of high-spending factory workers, their antecedents were more widely spread.

The assembly room was the first multi-purpose seaside entertainment building, an attempt to replicate the social life of the spas and attract a similar clientele. The spa and resort of Scarborough was the pioneer, with an assembly room and coffee house in the 1720s, but it was soon followed by many of the south coast resorts and by the 1820s-30s most resorts could provide dancing and other pastimes in their assembly rooms. More educational recreations took place in winter gardens, popular from the 1870s and often combined with aquaria. Although entertainment centres in miniature, they neither catered for the mass market of the late 19th century nor prospered financially. Theatres, pier pavilions and ballrooms were more lucrative, but required a constant flow of new patrons, while other seaside attractions required good weather. Something more was required, which built upon the novelty value of the seaside and provided an experience unobtainable elsewhere.

The first steps in the direction of the pleasure dome were taken in Blackpool by the Blackpool Winter Gardens and Pavilion Company Limited in 1875. The company expanded the idea of the winter garden as shelter to encompass a building including a covered promenade and theatre; what the directors envisaged was hardly a winter garden, though the name was useful as it implied some form of indoor entertainment. The company attempted to buy a site from one of its own directors, Blackpool landowner Dr W. H. Cocker, who was already much involved in several of the resort's other entertainment schemes. Cocker offered to sell the sea front site of his own house and the company accepted; Cocker was made company chairman in time for the opening. A design competition had been set for the Winter Gardens and the result was announced in 1876, a win for Oldham architects Mitchell and Macleod though, by the time the building was completed in July 1878, Macleod was not involved and Thomas Mitchell had his own practice in Manchester. The company stipulated that Cocker's house be retained (to avoid demolition costs) in addition to the theatre and walk, and the winning design also provided a domed entrance with a floral hall to the rear. The slender, glazed dome was capped by a

smaller one, and its 120 feet were intended to attract the attention of trippers on their way to the beach from the station. The remainder of the design consisted of an assortment of glazed areas centred on the Pavilion, a brick-built theatre space with an elegant apsidal end. Over three million bricks were used in the Winter Gardens, which cost nearly £100,000 and covered over two acres.

Despite its variety of spaces, the Winter Gardens provided little in the way of alternative entertainments; apart from the Pavilion there were indoor and outdoor skating rinks, refreshment rooms and a collection of flowers, ferns and statuary for promenaders to admire. Architecturally it was a theatre wrapped in a winter garden. Only a decade later, when poor financial performance forced the company to move downmarket and extend the complex to include an opera house and ballroom, did the Winter Gardens become a true pleasure dome.

Another forerunner of the multi-purpose entertainment building was erected across the Irish Sea in Douglas, Isle of Man, a popular destination for Lancastrian holidaymakers in the late 19th century. Derby Castle, a castellated villa built in 1836 at the north end of Douglas Bay, was turned into a successful pleasure centre in 1877 by the addition of a theatre and a large ballroom. The buildings were both basic sheds, functional but externally attractive with glazed gable ends bearing circular motifs. They were demolished in 1971 to make way for the Summerland complex. Also in Douglas was the Palace complex, which began with the building of the extravagant Palace Ballroom on a central Promenade site in 1889. An opera house was added in 1894, and the whole was remodelled in Edwardian Baroque style as the Palace Lido in 1913 by local architect George Kaye. Partly rebuilt after a fire in 1921, the Palace is still in use.

New Brighton's Palace Theatre, opened 1882, was part of a small-scale entertainment centre which included a covered amusement park, a theatre, a skating rink and an aquarium. The theatre was not imposing, with seating for only 750 on the flat ground floor, and was demolished in 1933. In a different class and for a different clientele was the Spa Building at Scarborough, built 1877-80 after Sir Joseph Paxton's 1858 Pavilion had been partially destroyed by fire. Though not exactly a mass leisure centre, it combined the functions of theatre, hall and baths and was designed by the London practice of Thomas Verity and G. H. Hunt, who specialised in theatres. The entrance hall had a grand double staircase, and the baths were decorated with brightly coloured tiles.

During the 1880s the poor economic climate put paid to much anticipated resort expansion; even in Blackpool no new theatres or pavilions were built until the end of the decade. But the 1890s began with a surge in demand for seaside holidays, encouraging local (and other) businessmen to renew their search for suitable entertainments centres. None of the previous attempts at this type of building had resulted in much more than large halls or winter gardens; architects had yet to face the problem of choosing an appropriate style for a pleasure dome. Impetus was given to the entertainments proprietors by the opening of the Eiffel Tower in Paris for the 1889 Exposition. It was the tallest building in the world, a novelty and technological feat, which provided spectacular views over Paris and rapidly recouped its cost. Nearly two million people visited the Tower over the five months of the Exposition, and the idea of a tower as a profitable attraction quickly took root

in Britain, particularly at the seaside, where the tower could be seen as a vertical version of the pier, combining a view with other entertainments. During the 1890s and into the next century patents for towers in a dizzy variety of shapes, heights and construction systems were granted, though most of these visions of delight were never built.

The British response to the Eiffel Tower was led by Sir Edward Watkin, chairman of the Metropolitan Railway Company, who formed the Metropolitan Tower Construction Company in 1889 to build an even taller tower. It was intended to be the centre of a vast outdoor amusement park at Wembley. It took five years for the Wembley Tower to reach the height of 155 ft, whereupon the money ran out; the stump remained until 1907. This failure did not prevent speculators and seaside businessmen from trying their luck with tower construction companies, but it certainly deterred potential investors. Brighton 'Eiffel' Tower and Winter Gardens Limited, incorporated in 1891 with a nominal capital of £210,000, only managed to raise £1,743 in its first five months and was wound up in October 1892.

The Blackpool Tower Company also began life in 1891, at the instigation of the Isle of Man based Standard Contract and Debenture Corporation, a company set up to profit from land speculation at seaside resorts. Among its other activities, the Corporation bought suitable tower sites in resorts, promoted the idea of tower construction and eventually made a profit from the sale of its site to a local company formed to build the tower. The putative Blackpool Tower at first aroused little public enthusiasm, especially with residents, who saw their tourist trade sliding downmarket, and the Tower Company's July 1891 share offer was one third undersubscribed. The Corporation was also in financial trouble by late 1891, and only the influence of the Tower Company's Chairman, John Bickerstaffe, Mayor of Blackpool, enabled the Company to continue with its plans and oust the Standard Contract and Debenture Corporation altogether.

Design work on the 'Blackpool Eiffel Tower' had been under way since the holding of an architectural competition in early 1891. The results were announced in July of that year, the winners being the Manchester practice Maxwell & Tuke, who had designed the Douglas Head Marine Drive, completed 1891. The Lowcock family of Whitchurch was heavily involved in the Douglas Head Marine Drive Company and the Douglas Head Suspension Bridge Company; four of the latter's directors were founder shareholders of the Blackpool Tower Company, and Arthur Lowcock was a director. The Lowcock connection may have influenced Maxwell & Tuke in their decision to enter the Tower competition.

Apart from the tower structure, Maxwell & Tuke could call upon no clear precedents for a building like this; previous entertainment buildings had almost all served single functions, but the Tower Buildings combined several in a single structure for which the architects had to find an entirely new design. The problem of labelling the complex as an entertainment centre was solved by the presence of the Tower, but there was no stylistic guide to the exterior. It was a new building type, the first of six such complexes erected in England or Wales around the turn of the century, and the precursor of the late 20th century leisure centres.

The promenade site for the Tower Buildings was almost rectangular, with the Tower itself in the centre, enclosed by the other facilities required by the Tower

Company. Maxwell & Tuke fitted the circus inside the Tower legs on the ground and first floors, located shops around much of the perimeter of the site, and filled the three-to-four-storey bulk of the Buildings with an aquarium, menagerie, restaurant, Grand Pavilion (later ballroom) and a winter garden on the roof, as well as the necessary services for both animals and humans. The exterior design, fated to be overwhelmed by the Tower, was conservative, using red brick and terracotta dressings 'of a somewhat elaborate character' as *Building News* reported. The most decorative features of the exterior were the glazing and the small corner turrets; the series of shop fronts and the doubleheight first floor windows gave the Tower Buildings the appearance of a department store, the nearest parallel, though a post-1900 development in England. The original Maxwell & Tuke design for the Tower Buildings contained two large arcades of shops, one either side of the circus, but this was dropped in favour of expanded entertainments areas.

Although Tower Buildings as a whole was unfinished, the Blackpool Tower opened to the public on Whit Monday.1894, and the remaining construction was completed soon after. Tower Buildings made up inside for what it lacked in external flair, even mundane areas such as corridors and staircases sparkling with turquoise and grey low-relief Burmantofts faience panels, set in red brick. The designs, showing birds, fishes and children, were modelled by E. C. Spruce. Along the corridor leading to the Grand Pavilion were more Burmantofts faience panels in blue and buff, showing a winged figure bearing cornucopia. The circus was unique, with the four legs of the Tower wrapped in cascades of gilded, scalloped moulding and glittering tiles forming the backdrop to the gallery seats. There was an Oriental feel to the decoration, which complemented the ornate turrets at the top of the Tower itself. The entire building was a showpiece of structural and decorative skills, from the engineering of the Tower and the flooding mechanism for the circus ring to the brilliant detail of the interior.

The Tower was a great success, one which the Blackpool Winter Gardens management countered by further expansion. Under William Holland, the London music hall impresario, an opera house had been added to the Winter Gardens complex in 1889. The architect of Her Majesty's Opera House was Frank Matcham, designer of over 150 theatres between 1879 and 1912. It was his first work in Blackpool, and he produced an opulent auditorium with three balconies, on a site just to the east of the domed Church Street entrance to the Gardens. Also in 1889 Thomas Mitchell redesigned the Winter Gardens Pavilion as a conventional theatre, installing a proscenium and fully equipped stage. At the start of the 1890s, the Winter Gardens was thus in a position to provide all-day entertainment, but competition from the new Tower forced Holland to add a ballroom, a lounge and a new entrance hall which opened in 1896, turning the Winter Gardens into a true pleasure dome, albeit not one built as an entity. The new entrance hall was decorated by 28 painted Doulton tile panels which filled the ceramic wall arcade. Their designer was William J. Neatby (1860-1910), head of Doulton's department of architectural decoration between 1890 and 1907. The colourful Art Nouveau panels showed female figures symbolising jewels. William Holland was also behind the introduction of the Gigantic Wheel, a giant Ferris Wheel, to the Winter Gardens in 1896 but this proved a rather dull entertainment and was never popular.

Mangnall & Littlewoods of Manchester, great rivals of Maxwell & Tuke in the design of seaside pleasure buildings, were architects for the Empress Ballroom in the enlarged Winter Gardens. They designed a vast, barrel-vaulted hall with a balcony promenade and a stage set into the south wall. The whole was richly decorated in what might be described as seaside Baroque; the capitals of the columns lining the balcony were adorned with grimacing faces, while the coffered ceiling had plasterwork by J. Boekbinder. The dance floor level was partially lined with Douulton faience, including elegant Art Nouveau murals of mermaids in rich, swirling blues, browns and greens. Mangnall & Littlewoods probably also designed the Indian Lounge, which formed the foyer for the ballroom and divided the Pavilion from the dance floor. The arcaded Lounge was decorated with Moghul-style plasterwork and painted scenes of the tropics; from that, a grand staircase led to the ballroom.

Thus by late 1896 Blackpool was home to two competing but highly successful pleasure centres, and it is no surprise that speculators and businessmen in Blackpool and other nearby resorts were encouraged to set up similar, grandiose schemes in the mid-1890s. The Tower and the Winter Gardens meanwhile continued to leapfrog each other with new facilities. In 1898 the Tower's Grand Pavilion underwent conversion to the Tower Ballroom, Frank Matcham being engaged to outdo the decorations of the Winter Gardens' Empress Ballroom. It was completed in 1899 and was one of Matcham's most important and unusual works. The new Ballroom, in French Renaissance style, had two tiers of balconies on three sides and a highly decorated proscenium arch over the concert platform, flanked by boxes topped with onion domed canopies. Spectacular plasterwork, gilding and painted panels covered every available surface.

The Tower Ballroom was another huge success, overshadowing improvements to the Winter Gardens Pavilion theatre in 1897, an early work of London music hall and pub architects, Oswald Wylson and Charles Long. They turned the Pavilion into one of the largest and finest music hall interiors in the country. By 1910, Matcham's Opera House interior had become unfashionable and it was demolished, to be replaced by Mangnall & Littlewoods' French classical Opera House which opened in June 1911, though design work had begun in 1902. Despite these attempts to keep up with popular taste, the Winter Gardens began to lose money, and was taken over by the Blackpool Tower Company in 1928. There were many subsequent alterations, the most obvious being the addition of the white faience facade on Coronation Street in 1929, designed by J. C. Derham. The Opera House was rebuilt in 1939 by Charles MacKeith, more in the manner of a cinema with two cantilevered balconies. The Tower Buildings suffered a sad loss when the Matcham interior of the Tower Ballroom was burnt out in 1956. It was, however, reconstructed to exactly the original design and reopened in 1958. Despite the changes befalling both the Tower Buildings and the Winter Gardens, as buildings they have fared better than all their turn of the century competitors.

The first of these originated in 1895 with the purchase by Liverpool Member of Parliament, R. B. Houston, of a suitable site for another 'Eiffel Tower' at Rock Point in New Brighton. His New Brighton Tower and Recreation Company was registered in 1896, and initially found capital easy to raise, doubtless benefiting from public knowledge of the success of Blackpool Tower's first seasons. Houston

acquired the services of the Blackpool Tower Company's general secretary and its architects, Maxwell and Tuke, and work on the New Brighton Tower Grounds began in July 1895. The local council delayed acceptance of plans for the Tower itself so the foundations were not laid until 1897. 3,500 men working day and night made it possible to open the incomplete Tower at Whitsun 1898.

Maxwell and Tuke had designed the new Brighton Tower during 1896 and, partly as a result of the larger area available at New Brighton, were able to produce a more expansive and exciting design than Blackpool Tower, their first attempt at a pleasure dome. The New Brighton version was bigger in every way, a monstrous Gothic pile of heroic proportions. The 567 ft 6 ins high Tower was 48 ft 9 ins taller than Blackpool Tower, and the buildings surrounding its base contained the Grand Tower Theatre, seating over 3,000 people, the Ballroom (or concert hall), a billiard saloon, a small menagerie, a restaurant and a winter garden. Maxwell and Tuke clothed the entertainment buildings in hard-wearing, red Ruabon brick with terracotta and stone dressings, and the plan of the buildings was octagonal, with the Tower, also built on an octagonal plan, at its centre. The roofline of the three-to-four-storey building was dramatic, as four corners of the octagon were emphasised by tall pavilions with steeply pitched roofs topped by cupolas. Apart from the decorative ironwork at the top of the Tower, none of the imagery of the New Brighton Tower was Oriental. The Ballroom, with a dance floor on which 1,000 couples could dance, was decorated in classical style in white and gold, and featured painted panels of the civic emblems of Lancashire towns. The Grand Tower Theatre was the largest theatre in England outside London, its spectacular interior located within the eight legs of the Tower.

Although the opening of the New Brighton Tower caused much excitement, the resort could not draw the necessary crowds and the Tower went into slow decline, the Ballroom becoming the most popular attraction. After lack of maintenance in the First World War, the Tower came down; demolition took nearly two years, from 1919 to 1921. The rest of the Tower Buildings remained until burnt out in 1969, and now local footballers play where Britain's tallest building once stood.

Although, as an entertainment centre it lacked the commercial success of Blackpool Tower Buildings, Maxwell and Tuke's New Brighton Tower continued the development of the building type, a monolithic block which reserved its delights for paying customers inside. The next architects to attempt such an exercise were Wylson and Long in Blackpool, the foundation stone of their Alhambra laid on 18 December 1897. By 1897 it had become clear that in Blackpool, at least, a profit could be made from entertainment centres. Shares in Alhambra (Blackpool) Limited were offered to the public in June 1897 and were immediately oversubscribed, the object of the company being to erect a pleasure building on the site of the Prince of Wales Theatre, which had opened in 1877. The Theatre was near the Tower Buildings and only a few hundred yards away from the Winter Gardens. In competition with Frank Matcham and C. J. Phipps, Wylson and Long won the contract. Demolition of the Prince of Wales and construction of the Alhambra took two years and, though the management tried to open the building for part of the 1899 season, well before it was complete, 1900 was the first full season and it was a disaster from the word go.

Wylson and Long produced three enormous spaces in one building, a 2,000 seat circus, a 3,000 capacity ballroom and a 3,000 seat theatre, as well as restaurants and a winter garden. The four-storey building had a Promenade site; the north side comprised three circus floors topped by the ballroom, and the theatre with its three balcony levels took up the whole of the south side. Externally this division was reflected by the presence of twin conical domes set back from a French Renaissance facade, with lavish Burmantofts terracotta decoration. Despite its size, the external appearance of the Alhambra was much more that of a traditional theatre than an entertainment centre, though its pair of domes did act as a landmark. Internally, all was superlative decoration, carried out by Messrs Whitehead of Blackpool. The circus and theatre had velvet drapes, Utrecht velvet upholstery and carpeting throughout, while the ballroom had a sprung parquet floor and carpeted balcony promenade. The cost of the Alhambra, including buildings and land, was £382,000.

The Alhambra was in the hands of the receiver by the end of 1902, the inconvenient design of the building taking some of the blame. Perhaps too much space had been given to the entertainment areas, and too little to circulation; in the Tower Buildings, so decorative were the circulation areas that they formed part of the unforgettable experience of the visit. Not wanting the Alhambra to fall into the hands of a rival and possibly more successful owner, nor investors to be deterred from putting more money into Blackpool, the Blackpool Tower Company bought the Alhambra in July 1903. Frank Matcham was asked to redesign the interior, and it reopened as the Palace in July 1904, featuring one of the first moving staircases in the world. A cinema was incorporated in 1911 and an underground passageway between Tower and Palace was provided in 1914; the visitor might easily have spent several days inside the double pleasure dome. The Palace closed in 1961 and was replaced by Lewis's store, shopping being a more modern entertainment.

The Morecambe Tower Company Limited was registered in October 1898 in order to erect a tower and other entertainment buildings designed by two of its founders, John Tillotson and Tom Bradley, at the north-east end of Morecambe's sea front. Bradley, an architect, had in March 1898 patented an idea for a cone-shaped tower ascended by a spiral tramway, and the new Company was licensed to use this invention. The architects for the tower buildings were to be William Hampden Sugden and Arthur Sugden of Keighley, best known for their domestic work in the Keighley area. By March 1899 the Company had issued 12,910 shares to 289 investors spread throughout Lancashire and West Yorkshire, and taken in over £6,000. Building work was in progress by May 1899 and, by the following summer, the skeleton of the tower and probably some of the base buildings were complete. Sadly the Company was unable to raise anything like its nominal capital of £70,000 and further construction stopped; a liquidator was appointed in July 1901 and the Company was wound up in October 1904.

The original concept of the Morecambe Tower was the production of an entirely Oriental environment on the sea front, with the grounds laid out to Eastern designs and all the buildings in Oriental styles and colours. The visitor climbing the spiral road to the top of the Tower would have first passed through an Eastern bazaar, with stallkeepers in Moorish, Egyptian, Turkish and other ethnic dress; other attractions planned around and in the base of the Tower were a concert hall, a

ballroom, restaurants and shops. The design showed an arcaded road spiralling up the Tower, which was topped by an onion dome and a giant figure carrying a searchlight, which bore some resemblance to the Statue of Liberty of 1886.

The Morecambe Tower was bought by the Morecambe Tower and Estates Company in 1909, one of its directors being William Hardcastle, a Scarborough gentleman and a founder of the previous Morecambe Tower Company. Although poorly supported, the new Company completed some of the base buildings, including the shops and the Pavilion, intended to have a capacity of 5,000, and opened in 1909. A ballroom was built in 1911. The two-storey base buildings, apparently finished to the original design, had a gently curving frontage with an arcade of shops along the ground floor. Ornate turrets capped by small onion domes decorated the polychromatic facade, in the centre of which was a large dome marking the entrance to the gardens. The facade shared some characteristics with Blackpool Tower Buildings; as well as the tower, the arcade of shops and large first floor windows suggested the same department store image, in this case rather more Orientalised.

The new Company's prospectus described the entertainments for the 1909 summer season as including 'Native Villages, Figure Eight, Toboggan Slide or Switchback Railway, Hall of Laughter, Riding Devices, Gravity Canal, Skating Rinks, Shooting Jungle, Helter Skelter, Pierrots Variety Entertainments, etc, etc'. Tom Bradley had become a Company director and managed the Tower Building in 1909 but, despite these amusements, the season was not a great success, and the Company was in debt by early 1910. During the First World War the Tower was dismantled and the materials used for armaments. By 1919, the Company was entirely in the hands of the Hardcastle family and a receiver was appointed in 1924, although the Tower was still taking £9,000 a year in 1927-28. It was sold to Gaumont in 1928, then Rank in 1952; it closed in 1959 and was demolished in 1961. It was a particularly elegant example of an Oriental pleasure dome.

The massive Southend Kursaal originated with a speculative venture of 1897 initiated by the Pyramidal Syndicate Limited, a seaside property company which collapsed in 1899. Probably with the intention of profiting from land sales, it promoted the London-based Southend-on-Sea Tower and Marine Park Company, registered in December 1897 to take over an existing pleasure ground. The Company's name was changed to Margate and Southend Kursaals Limited in May 1898. The original meaning of 'kursaal' was a public room in a German spa, but it came to mean any large public resort building. The Company's shares were popular in the London area and with potentially interested parties such as contractor Abram Kellett of Ealing, who took up over 40,000, and brewers Samuel Allsopp & Sons of Burton, who held 30,500 shares in 1899. The Pyramidal Syndicate was also a shareholder, and its liquidation may have caused the winding up of the Kursaal company in 1903. Before that the Syndicate had begun improvements with the intention of producing a southern version of Blackpool Winter Gardens. The architects were George Sherrin and John Clarke of London; Sherrin is, best known for his Spitalfields Market while the younger Clarke, only 17 at the time of his work on the Kursaal, later worked in South Africa before returning to practise in

Eastbourne. This was an unusual commission for the two architects, and possibly resulted from a financial connection with the companies concerned.

Sherrin and Clarke's 1898 design included a tower, circus, theatre, arcade, 90 shops and 53 houses, all enclosed in a two-to-three-storey building with a first floor canopy running round part of the perimeter. The centre of the Kursaal was marked by a large, domed tower, in style Baroque rather than Oriental, though the combination of shop frontage plus tower was identical to the Morecambe Tower. The theatre, the Kursaal Palace, was a large, flat-floored music hall and ballroom.

In 1901 the Kursaal was taken over by a new company, Southend Kursaal Limited, which was almost wholly owned by Samuel Allsopp by June 1903; the Kursaal site included a large Allsopp public house. In 1904 a local guidebook described the Kursaal as a replica of Blackpool's Winter Gardens- Although it was successful, later development concentrated on attractions in the amusement park, the Marine Park and later Luna Park, rather than the Kursaal itself. The Kursaal still stands, though it has changed hands several times since the early years of the century and the theatre was last used in the mid-1970s.

The sixth and most short-lived of the turn of the century pleasure domes was the Queen's Palace, opened at Rhyll, a popular haunt of north-western holidaymakers, on 1 August 1902. Under the great, glazed dome of the Palace was a vast array of amusements: a ballroom with sprung parquet floor on which 2,000 couples could dance, a theatre, a winter garden, 40 shops, a zoo, a waxworks, a native village and, under the ballroom, the most delightful feature of all, an imitation Venice with real canals, gondolas - and Italians. The whole edifice was destroyed by fire in 1907, the dome falling into the adjoining road. Thus only the first pleasure palace, Blackpool Winter Gardens, and two of the six great pleasure domes, Southend Kursaal and Blackpool Tower Buildings, still survive, relics of an era of mass entertainment and the search for novelty.

Most of the pleasure palaces included a circus in their design but, although a few purposebuilt circuses were erected at the seaside in the late 19th century, most were later converted to theatres or other uses, as were their inland equivalents. Fashions in entertainment ebbed and flowed, and a circus arena was far less adaptable to new events than a conventional theatre. Scarborough Hippodrome of 1876, which housed the Prince of Wales Circus, was constructed of massive wooden trusses and cast-iron columns enclosed by a brick wall. It was converted to a theatre in 1900 and a whole new theatre was built inside the original structure in 1908 by local architect Frank Tugwell. Tugwell is best known for his internal reconstruction of the Savoy Theatre in London's Strand, carried out in 1929 with Basil Ionides.

Blackpool Hippodrome originated as the flat-floored Empire music hall-cum-ballroom built in 1895 by J. D. Harker, and was converted to a circus in 1900, probably as a result of the popularity of the Tower Circus. It lasted only 10 years before the arena was removed. More significant for circus history is the work of circus performer and entrepreneur George Gilbert, who built both the Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft Hippodromes. The Great Yarmouth Hippodrome is unique, being the only surviving building intended wholly for circus use and still performing that function. His architect for the Great Yarmouth and probably Lowestoft Hippodromes was Ralph Scott Cockrill. The exterior of the Great

Yarmouth Hippodrome, opened on 20 July 1903, was decorated with exuberant Art Nouveau terracotta. The entrance is marked by twin domes, and three stained glass windows portraying a classical chariot race originally graced the front of the building. It seated 2,500 and, although the interior has been much altered, the original ring-flooding mechanism has been restored. Around the end of the 19th century flooding was one of the most popular acts in the circus, and continued as such until interest in the circus generally declined after the First World War. The Hippodrome has a double roof structure and two foot thick concrete walls, designed to improve noise insulation. Lowestoft Hippodrome opened in 1904 and, in addition to the circus ring, had a stage with an ornate proscenium arch. The elegant exterior was again Art Nouveau, with terracotta panels. The circus ring was removed in 1947, but the building continues in use, although not as a theatre.

The pleasure dome tradition was prolonged in 1911 by the construction of Spanish City at Whitley Bay, the shining white, reinforced concrete dome of its rotunda concealing a large flatfloored theatre behind. The architects were Newcastle upon Tyne practice, James Thoburn Cackett and R. Burns Dick, who produced a classic pleasure dome design with shops on the exterior and the entertainment area marked by a dome. The building had a Classical facade, and the interior combined Moorish and Classical decoration. It was not the last of the pleasure domes, although the Modern Movement dramatically altered the style of seaside buildings between the Wars. The dome or tower remained an evocative symbol of pleasure and the delights within, well illustrated by the change in name of Worthing's domed Kursaal to the Dome Cinema in 1914. The pleasure palace or leisure centre as a building type has enjoyed a resurgence in the late 20th century, and its basic design, an entertainments shed topped by a landmark, though updated, has shown remarkably few changes. Seaside symbolism is now in general use; whether at a seaside resort or inland, a dome or brightly coloured water chute is the outward mark of the availability of new and sophisticated amusements at the leisure centre, the remainder of the exterior being left relatively plain. A fine inland example of this style is the aptly named Dome leisure centre at Doncaster, opened 1990. Leisure for masses of individuals rather than mass leisure is currently on offer, but the concept of the pleasure dome is as attractive as ever.