

= Belle Vue Zoological Gardens =

Belle Vue Zoological Gardens was a large zoo , amusement park , exhibition hall complex and speedway stadium in Belle Vue , Manchester , England , opened in 1836 . The brainchild of John Jennison , the gardens were initially intended to be an entertainment for the genteel middle classes , with formal gardens and dancing on open @-@ air platforms during the summer , but they soon became one of the most popular attractions in Northern England . Before moving to Belle Vue , Jennison , a part @-@ time gardener , had run a small aviary at his home , the beginnings of the zoo that over the years grew to become the third @-@ largest in the United Kingdom .

Jennison set out a small amusements area in Belle Vue during the 1870s , which was expanded in the early 20th century to become what was advertised as the " showground of the world " . Popular rides included the 60 mph ( 97 km / h ) Bobs roller coaster and the Scenic Railway . Other entertainments included grand firework displays from 1852 and an annual Christmas circus from 1922 . Music and dancing were popular attractions in Belle Vue 's various ballrooms . The Kings Hall , opened in 1910 , housed the Hallé Orchestra for several years and hosted concerts by artists such as Jimi Hendrix , The Who , The Rolling Stones , Leonard Cohen , Johnny Cash and Led Zeppelin .

Catering for visitors at Belle Vue was on an industrial scale , ranging from the late 19th century hot water rooms , which accommodated up to 3 @, @ 000 diners each , providing crockery and hot water for those who brought their own picnics , to more upmarket themed restaurants . Belle Vue became a part of the caterer and hotelier Charles Forte 's business empire towards the end of its life in the 1960s . Although he made some improvements to the zoo , Forte 's interests lay in developing the gardens ' dining and exhibition facilities . The Kings Hall was then the largest exhibition space outside London , but competition from the G @-@ Mex exhibition and conference centre in central Manchester led directly to its closure in 1987 .

At its peak Belle Vue occupied 165 acres ( 0 @. @ 67 km<sup>2</sup> ) and attracted more than two million visitors a year , up to 250 @, @ 000 of whom visited over the Easter weekend . The zoo closed in September 1977 after its owners decided they could no longer afford its losses of £ 100 @, @ 000 a year . The amusement park remained open on summer weekends until 1980 . The land was sold in 1982 , and the site finally cleared in 1987 . All that remains of Belle Vue today is a greyhound racing stadium and a snooker hall built in the stadium 's car park .

= = Commercial history = =

Belle Vue Zoological Gardens was the brainchild of entrepreneur and part @-@ time gardener John Jennison . He opened the grounds around his home in Adswold , Stockport to the public in 1826 , from where he and his wife Maria sold fruit and vegetables . He called his establishment Strawberry Gardens , later Jennison 's Gardens . Manchester 's increasing urban population encouraged the development of a thriving leisure industry , and public parks were popular . In 1828 or ' 29 Jennison purchased an adjacent 0 @. @ 5 acres ( 0 @. @ 20 ha ) of land on which he and his wife built an aviary , to which they charged admission ; its first occupant was a captured thrush . Jennison turned his home into a public house , the Adam and Eve , which he and his wife ran together .

In 1835 Jennison was approached by businessman George Gill , who suggested that he lease Belle Vue ? a public house in 35 @. @ 75 acres ( 14 @. @ 47 ha ) of open land between Kirkmanshulme Lane and Hyde Road ? as a more suitable site for his aviary . Jennison took out a mortgage of £ 300 to pay off the £ 80 mortgage on the Strawberry Gardens and spent the remainder on a trial six @-@ month lease of the Belle Vue property , in June 1836 . In December Jennison signed a 99 @-@ year lease at a rent of £ 135 per annum . For an extra £ 100 a year he leased additional land to extend the western boundary to Redgate Lane , close to Stockport Road , where he made a second entrance . To finance further expansion Jennison re @-@ mortgaged the site for £ 800 .

Except for their belongings , which fitted on a handcart , all the Jennisons took with them to Belle Vue was two or three birdcages containing parrots and other assorted birds . At its opening in 1836 , Belle Vue contained an Italian Garden , lakes , mazes and hothouses , as well as the aviary . The

family decided that their zoological collection had to be expanded as a matter of priority , and by 1839 elephants , lions , and other exotic African animals had been added . Many other attractions were subsequently added , including a racecourse in 1847 . The gardens were an immediate success , but the neighbouring St James 's Church was offended that they were open on Sundays , and asked Jennison to close while services were being conducted ; he " politely but firmly refused " .

Admission to the gardens , which were open until 9 pm during the summer , was by subscription ticket priced at 10 shillings for a family and 5 shillings for an individual , beyond the means of most workers . Concerts of " genteel music " were staged , and there was dancing to various bands on a large open @-@ air wooden platform . Initially , the only public transport to Belle Vue was by horse @-@ drawn omnibus from what is now Piccadilly , in central Manchester , but the last departure time of 6 : 00 pm coincided with the end of most workers ' shifts . The first railway station was opened near Belle Vue in 1842 , allowing workers easier access to the gardens and their attractions , and by 1848 complaints began to appear in the press that " roughs " in coarse attire were embarrassing middle @-@ class ladies on the dancing platform by attempting to dance with them . There were also complaints about working @-@ class men dancing together , and increasing resentment from working @-@ class patrons about Belle Vue 's " forbidding dress requirements , its restricted opening hours , [ and ] its unwelcoming admission price " . In the words of historian David Mayer , Jennison was facing a crisis : " either keep Belle Vue Gardens an exclusive , class @-@ specific , genteel preserve for the gentry and the middle class ? who would arrive and depart in their own carriages through the Hyde Road gate ? or open the gardens to a popular crowd who would arrive by train at the Stockport Road ( Longsight ) gate " . For a time , Jennison sent carriages to the railway station to collect the first @-@ class passengers , but he also abandoned the idea of subscription tickets , settling instead on a general admission price of 4d , rising to 6d in 1851 .

== Financial difficulties ==

Although the gardens thrived in their early years , by 1842 Jennison was in financial difficulties , and on 13 December bankruptcy proceedings were initiated . Jennison 's problems were caused by his failure to sell the Strawberry Gardens property , competition from the recently opened Manchester Zoological Gardens , and the Manchester and Birmingham Railway track cutting through the land Jennison had leased in December 1836 , restricting access to the gardens . Jennison twice tried unsuccessfully to sell Belle Vue , after which his creditors allowed him time to make a success of the gardens ; by the end of the 1843 season Jennison was able to repay his debts . The railway that had been a thorn in his side eventually proved to be an asset when Longsight railway station was re @-@ sited closer to Belle Vue in 1842 , making it easier for visitors to reach the gardens .

== Expansion ==

An additional 13 acres ( 5 @.@ 3 ha ) of farmland at the western end of the site was incorporated into the gardens in 1843 . One of the ponds was enlarged to form a boating lake , which later became the Firework Lake . An island was created in the middle of the lake , which housed a natural history museum . In 1858 another 8 acres ( 3 @.@ 2 ha ) were leased , in the triangle between Kirkmanshulme Lane and Hyde Road , from which clay was extracted to make bricks for the gardens ' buildings . The result of the excavations was a large hole that Jennison filled with water , creating the Great Lake in 1858 . Two paddle steamers , the Little Eastern and the Little Britain , each capable of accommodating 100 passengers , offered trips around the lake for 1d ( equivalent to £ 0 @.@ 38 in 2015 ) . By 1905 Belle Vue consisted of 68 acres ( 28 ha ) of walled gardens , with an additional 97 acres ( 39 ha ) outside its walls .

== War years ==

During the First World War the gardens were used by the Manchester Regiment for drilling , and a munitions factory complete with railway sidings was built .

At the start of the Second World War the gardens were closed at noon following Neville Chamberlain 's radio broadcast announcing that Britain was at war with Germany on Sunday , 3 September 1939 , forcing the cancellation of an " open rehearsal " by the Gorton Philharmonic Orchestra . The nation 's armed forces immediately sequestered the Exhibition Hall , the restaurants and most of the top floor of the administrative offices . They also took over the sports ground to use as a barrage balloon base , and dug several air @-@ raid shelters . The gardens were allowed to re @-@ open on 15 September 1939 , and remained open throughout the rest of war , although parts of the site were requisitioned by Manchester Corporation and converted into allotments .

Although the Second World War forced the cancellation of many events , and made it difficult to feed all the zoo 's animals , it was nevertheless very lucrative for the gardens . Profits steadily increased , and the company made several compensation claims for the requisitioning of its facilities . It was granted £ 4 @,@ 000 in 1941 ( equivalent to £ 179 @,@ 000 in 2015 ) and £ 7 @,@ 242 in 1942 ( equivalent to £ 304 @,@ 000 in 2015 ) ; in gratitude for the latter , the company presented the Civil Defence Service with a new mobile canteen .

= = = Changes in ownership = = =

The Jennisons had been considering setting up a limited company to administer the gardens since 1895 . Most were in agreement except for Richard , John Jennison Snr 's youngest son . After his death in 1919 , the remaining family members created John Jennison & Co Ltd with a capital of £ 253 @,@ 000 ( equivalent to £ 10 @,@ 500 @,@ 000 in 2015 ) , comprising investments and loans totalling £ 63 @,@ 000 ( equivalent to £ 2 @,@ 600 @,@ 000 in 2015 ) . George Jennison became chairman , secretary , treasurer and joint managing director with John Jennison Jnr , John Jennison Snr 's great @-@ grandson . John , William , Angelo and Richard Jennison Jnr were appointed to the board of directors which was reported to be a " very happy board with few meetings and an entire absence of quarrels " .

On 27 November 1924 the Jennisons agreed to sell Belle Vue for £ 250 @,@ 000 ( equivalent to £ 12 @,@ 900 @,@ 000 in 2015 ) to Harry George Skipp , but he was acting as an intermediary , and on 6 March 1925 a further contract was signed by the Jennisons , Skipp and a new company called Belle Vue ( Manchester ) Ltd . The agreement was for the new company to take over from 1 January 1925 , but the transfer did not take place until 28 March . Under the new managing director , John Henry Iles , the gardens expanded to include what became a world @-@ famous amusement park .

= = = Later years = = =

Belle Vue enjoyed a brief post @-@ war boom between the end of the Second World War and the early 1950s . During the early 1960s , it could still attract 150 @,@ 000 visitors on Easter Monday , but by the end of the decade that figure had dropped to about 30 @,@ 000 , as the competition from rival amusement parks increased . Sir Leslie Joseph and Charles Forte bought Belle Vue in 1956 , but by 1963 Forte was in sole control . Although he made some improvements to the zoo , Forte 's interests lay in developing the gardens ' dining and exhibition facilities . Fire became an " ever present hazard " during Belle Vue 's later years . The most devastating occurred in 1958 and destroyed many buildings , including the Coronation Ballroom . Although the zoo was spared , the fire almost reached the lion house , distressing one of the older lionesses so much that she had to be shot . Vandalism and theft also became serious and recurring problems ; intruders killed 38 of the zoo 's birds , including 9 penguins , in 1960 .

= = Zoo = =

Belle Vue was the first privately financed zoo in England , and grew to become the third @-@ largest in the UK . Jennison 's original idea was that the gardens should be primarily a botanical

excursion , but it became clear that the public was interested in the animals as an attraction in their own right . The initial collection had consisted of domestic birds and a few exotic parrots , but Jennison probably also acquired those animals that could not be sold after the Manchester Zoological Gardens closed in 1842 . By 1856 , the Jennisons had added kangaroos , rhinos , lions , bears and gazelles .

In 1871 the zoo acquired four giraffes ; the following year an elephant , Maharajah , was bought for £ 680 from Wombwell 's Menagerie No.1 in Edinburgh . The plan to transport Maharajah from Edinburgh to Manchester by train was abandoned after the elephant destroyed the railway compartment in which he was to travel . It was therefore decided that Maharajah and his trainer , Lorenzo Lawrence , should walk to Manchester , a journey they completed in 10 days with little incident . Lorenzo became the zoo 's head elephant keeper , and stayed at Belle Vue for more than 40 years . Maharajah provided elephant rides to the public for ten years , until his death from pneumonia in 1882 . His skeleton was preserved and added to the gardens ' natural history museum . When the museum was decommissioned in 1941 , the skeleton , along with other exhibits , was transferred to the Manchester Museum .

In 1893 a chimpanzee was purchased from another of Wombwell 's Travelling Menageries in London . The four @-@ year @-@ old chimpanzee , Consul , was dressed in a smoking jacket and cap and puffed on a cob pipe ; he frequently accompanied James Jennison to business meetings . Consul proved to be exceptionally popular , and after his death on 24 November 1894 , the Jennisons immediately obtained a replacement , Consul II , who played a violin while riding a tricycle around the gardens , later graduating to a bicycle .

Food for the animals became difficult to obtain during the First World War , but for the most part the gardens carried on as usual . Following the declaration of peace , several monkeys originally destined for government experiments with poison gas were acquired , as was a hippo , a dromedary and a zebra . In 1921 and 1922 the zoo obtained two animals who became great favourites . Lil , an Indian elephant , arrived in 1921 accompanied by her British Malayan handler , Phil Fernandez . Phil and Lil provided entertainment , advertising , and elephant rides for 35 years . Frank , a brown bear , arrived in 1922 . By the time of his death , 40 years later , he was known as the " Father of the Zoo " .

Open @-@ air cages installed in the Monkey House resulted in a dramatic improvement in the life expectancy of its residents , but the potential for expansion and improvement after the First World War was limited by the post @-@ war economy . Rising labour costs and minimal profits resulted in the gardens ' increasing dilapidation . The zoo began to be neglected after the sale of Belle Vue in 1925 , but it was rejuvenated by the appointment of Gerald Iles as zoo superintendent in 1933 . A new Gibbon Cage and Monkey Mountain were created and the Reptile House was extended .

On the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 , the animal keepers were issued with rifles to deal with any dangerous animals who might escape if the gardens were bombed . A night shift was introduced to watch over the animals 24 hours a day . A list of dangerous animals that was drawn up included 13 lions , 6 tigers , 2 leopards , 1 cheetah , 2 tigers , 3 other small cats and several bears . Although the zoo 's administrators succeeded in convincing the local authorities that any danger from the animals was minimal , primarily because the perimeter walls were so high , the keepers were replaced in their sharp @-@ shooting role by soldiers who patrolled the grounds armed with tommy guns .

Stocks were increased by animals transferred from other zoos that had been forced to close . Initially the zoo was given favourable food rationing quotas , but certain foods became unavailable and the price of others increased dramatically . Bananas were impossible to obtain and the supply of fish was problematic . As a result , the keepers were forced to experiment . The sealions became casualties of the food shortage when their keepers attempted to feed them strips of beef soaked in cod liver oil . Although they seemed to thrive on this diet , their digestive systems were unable to cope with the unusual food , and they eventually died of stomach ulcers . The lions ' new diet was green @-@ coloured horsemeat , and the monkeys were fed on boiled potatoes . The birds @-@ of @-@ paradise ( lack of millet ) , and the penguins ( lack of fish ) , were unable to adapt to their make @-@ do diet and also succumbed . Vegetables were not in short supply however , as the

garden staff grew lettuce , cabbage and carrots in the kitchen gardens .

Wartime interruptions in the supply of gas for heating resulted in the deaths of all the zoo 's tropical fish and several other animals , including a lioness called Pearl and her litter of cubs . Although Manchester was heavily bombed during the Blitz , the gardens sustained only minor damage . The Scenic Railway was hit by an incendiary bomb and the Reptile House was damaged by shell splinters from ack @-@ ack guns , which also caused the death of a bull bison .

Iles remained as superintendent until 1957 , and proved to be a good publicist for the zoo , taking part in radio and television programmes such as Children 's Hour . A new attraction was introduced in 1963 , a Chimps ' Tea Party , which proved to be very popular . The zoo 's last superintendent , Peter Grayson , took over in 1971 , but by then the owners of Belle Vue had lost interest in the zoo , and closure seemed imminent .

News that Belle Vue Zoological Gardens would close on 11 September 1977 was announced on BBC Radio at 10 : 00 am on 4 August 1977 . The 24 keepers were informed an hour before the news report went on air . The reason given was that the company could no longer afford to cover losses of about £ 100 @,@ 000 per year . Shortly before the closure , a number of non @-@ poisonous reptiles were stolen from the Reptile House , only one of which , a 10 @-@ foot ( 3 @.@ 0 m ) python , was recovered .

A 15 @-@ year @-@ old elephant , Ellie May , had acquired an undeserved reputation for being dangerous , which made her extremely difficult to sell . Her food costs became difficult to justify , but Grayson refused to have her put down . Although he left the zoo in January 1978 , Grayson returned frequently to care for Ellie May , the last animal left at the zoo . Eventually Rotterdam Zoo agreed to take her , and plans were made to transport the elephant to the Netherlands . Ellie May refused to budge however , and overnight developed pneumonia and heart failure . Grayson and veterinary surgeon , David Taylor , felt that she would not recover , and decided to call in a marksman to euthanise her .

Public reaction to the zoo 's closure was one of " relative indifference " , with only a few minor protests . The doors remained open to visitors at a discounted admission price until early November , a little beyond the official closing date , by which time most of the animals had been sold for an estimated £ 100 @,@ 000 .

= = Gardens and amusement park = =

Under the Jennisons , the main priorities for Belle Vue were the zoological and botanical gardens ; amusements were provided merely as a distraction . The Jennisons laid out formal gardens in various styles between 1836 and 1898 , including mazes , grottoes , an Italian garden , " billiard @-@ table lawns " and constructed Tropical Plant Houses . There were also exotic constructions like the Indian temple and grotto , designed by George Danson , Belle Vue 's scenic artist . Built to resemble a ruined temple , it housed snakes and crocodiles as well as flowers . At the end of the 19th century , " the resort relied almost entirely for its attraction on its delightful gardens " , but by 1931 the formalism had entirely disappeared . The gardens were also used to stage large political rallies for a wide spectrum of opinion , such as the Great Liberal Demonstration of 1924 , at which Lloyd George addressed a crowd of 50 @,@ 000 , the first political meeting at which loudspeakers were used . The British Union of Fascists , popularly known as the Blackshirts , also held a meeting there , in September 1934 . One contemporary commentator observed that " perhaps the Ku Klux Klan will be found in session there one day , for Belle Vue is nothing if not catholic " .

The Jennisons set out a small amusements area near the main entrance to the gardens in Hyde Road during the 1870s. comprising steam @-@ driven attractions such as the Ocean Wave , installed in 1894 , which simulated a storm at sea .

John Henry Iles , who took over control of Belle Vue in 1925 , believed that expansion of the rides and the fun aspect of the park was the way forward , and added attractions such as dodgems , the Caterpillar , the Ghost Train , Jack & Jill , and the Flying Sea Planes . The Scenic Railway , purchased in 1925 but not fully operational until two years later , proved to be one of Belle Vue 's most popular rides , and remained in use until 1975 .

The Bobs rollercoaster was arguably the most popular ride of all , so named because it cost a bob ( shilling ) for admission . It had an 80 @-@ foot ( 24 m ) drop at a 45 degree angle , down which the cars travelled at 60 miles per hour ( 97 km / h ) . It was built by Harry Traver and designed by Fredrick Church , who had to develop a series of engineering innovations to make the ride possible . The Bobs ' distinctive white @-@ painted wooden superstructure became an imposing element of the Belle Vue skyline .

During the 1960s and 70s " Professor " Len Tomlinson operated one of the UK 's last flea circuses in a small booth on the amusement park . The attraction consisted of harnessed human fleas racing chariots at the rate of an inch every few seconds , pulling a garden roller , riding a tricycle and " fencing fleas " scrabbling at pins stuck in pieces of cork in a semblance of a sword fight . The flea circus closed down in the late 1970s as improvements in domestic living conditions made human fleas more difficult to obtain .

When the zoo closed in 1977 , it was announced that the gardens and amusement park would be expanded with " new active leisure pursuits " . By 1978 the site had been renamed Belle Vue Leisure Park , and the Tropical River House had been converted to a skateboard arena in an attempt to cash in on the new craze from America . The arena turned out to be poor investment however , as there was virtually no demand after the first few months . The 1977 closure of the London Festival Gardens in Battersea , London , allowed Belle Vue the opportunity to buy their Jetstream ride , which opened the following year .

Other attractions that closed at about the same time as the zoo included the boating on Firework Lake , and the miniature railway . In 1979 the amusement park was leased to the main concessionaire , Alf Wadbrooke , although by then it was only open at weekends during the summer season . The long @-@ promised restoration of the Scenic Railway had not happened and the Water Chute had closed . In August 1980 , Wadbrooke was given notice to close down the park by 26 October 1980 and to have all his equipment removed by February 1981 .

= = Music and dancing = =

In 1853 Belle Vue staged the first British open brass band championships . Attended by a crowd of more than 16 @,@ 000 , it was the first of what became an annual event until 1981 . A revival occurred in the popularity of brass band contests during the 1970s ; competitions between local bands could attract crowds of up to 5 @,@ 000 .

Belle Vue contained several ballrooms , the first of which was constructed in 1851 , above a hotel at the Longsight entrance to the gardens . A larger structure , the Music Hall , was built in 1856 , underneath the firework viewing stand , capable of accommodating 10 @,@ 000 people on its 27 @,@ 000 square feet ( 2 @,@ 500 m2 ) of dance floor . A wooden open @-@ air dancing platform was opened in 1852 , and by 1855 had been extended to cover an area of 0 @.@ 5 acres ( 0 @.@ 20 ha ) . Throughout the summer , music was provided by bands such as the Belle Vue Military , the Belle Vue Quadrille and the Cheetham Hill Brass Band . Open @-@ air dancing continued until the 1940s , but by then the attraction had lost its appeal , and the platform was converted to a roller skating rink . It was destroyed by fire in 1958 . The same fire destroyed the Coronation Ballroom , which was replaced by a " huge ballroom complex " known as the New Elizabethan Ballroom in 1959 . With room for 4 @,@ 000 dancers on its two floors , and the largest Wurlitzer organ in Europe ( installed in 1967 ) , it was described as being " unsurpassed in Great Britain for size , comfort and elegance " . Many well @-@ known bands of the time regularly played for the dancers , including Geraldo and his Orchestra and the Joe Loss Orchestra . During the 1960s and ' 70s the ballroom also hosted discothèques , such as Jimmy Savile 's Top Ten Club .

= = Kings Hall = =

Opened in 1910 the Kings Hall was a converted tea room , enlarged in 1928 and reconstructed as a " saucer like arena " capable of seating 7 @,@ 000 people . The name " Kings " was chosen in reference to the two kings who reigned during the six @-@ week period of its construction : George

V and Edward VII . The hall was designed to stage " Demonstrations , Exhibitions , Social Gatherings , etc " , and was a popular concert venue until the 1970s , with appearances by artists such as Jimi Hendrix , The Who , The Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin . The Kings Hall became home to the Hallé Orchestra in 1942 , when its previous base , the Free Trade Hall , was damaged by bombing during the Manchester Blitz ; the orchestra continued to perform concerts at Belle Vue for more than 30 years .

From 1961 until 1966 , bingo sessions were held in the hall . Able to accommodate up to 3 @, @ 500 players , it was advertised as the " largest bingo club in the world " . Many exhibitions were also held in the hall , which with its 100 @, @ 000 square feet ( 9 @, @ 300 m<sup>2</sup> ) of floor space was one of the largest venues outside London . It was split into three separate halls in 1956 , to allow three exhibitions to be run simultaneously .

The last piece of live music played in the hall , on 14 February 1982 , was a performance by the Glossop School Band , who were taking part in the North West Amateur Brass Band Championship in front of a crowd of 1 @, @ 700 . The hall had been sold 18 months earlier to a development company , Espley Tyas Development Group , and was by then scheduled for demolition to allow the site to be redeveloped . News of the sale had triggered the formation of local action groups , who organised a petition signed by 50 @, @ 000 people in an unsuccessful effort to save the hall . The exhibition halls were sold to Mullet Ltd. in 1983 , but competition from the newly opened G @- @ Mex exhibition and conference centre in central Manchester led directly to their closure . The site was sold to the British Car Auction Group in 1987 , and the buildings demolished to make way for a large car auction centre .

= = Catering = =

The gates were opened to visitors between 10 : 00 am and 10 : 30 pm . Kiosks around the gardens sold snacks and ice cream , made in Belle Vue 's own ice cream factory . Families were catered for at lunchtimes by the hot @- @ water rooms , each of which could accommodate up to 3 @, @ 000 diners , providing hot water for drinks and crockery for visitors who brought their own picnics . The price was 2d per person , according to the 1892 guide book , and cakes and jams made in the gardens ' bakery and on @- @ site kitchens were also available , at extra cost . " One shilling tea rooms " , close to the hot water rooms , offered lunchtime deals such as a pot of tea , bread and butter , green salad and fruit cake for a shilling . The more expensive restaurants tended to open during the evening . Alcohol was available in the many licensed premises in the gardens , including , until its closure in 1928 , beer produced in Belle Vue 's on @- @ site brewery . Many public houses were also opened in the area immediately surrounding the gardens .

Licensed hotels were built at each of the three entrances to the gardens . The Longsight Hotel , built in 1851 and demolished in 1985 , was a part of the entrance . The Lake Hotel , built in 1876 , had facilities for the free stabling of horses belonging to Belle Vue 's visitors . It was extended in 1929 and then again in 1960 , when a concert room was added , offering late @- @ night entertainment . After its closure in the 1980s , the hotel was demolished . The Hyde Road Hotel and Restaurant at the main entrance , originally known as Belle Vue House , was renamed the Palm Court Restaurant in 1942 , and then Caesar 's Palace in 1969 . It housed a cabaret bar and a restaurant , which was converted to an amusement arcade in 1976 when it was once again renamed , to Jennison 's Ale House . The building was closed after a partial collapse in 1980 .

= = Firework displays = =

After a trip to London to visit The Great Exhibition of 1851 , Jennison 's ideas for Belle Vue became more ambitious . He decided to implement large , scheduled " fantastic " firework displays employing a scenic artist , George Danson , to design and create a 30 @, @ 000 @- @ square @- @ foot ( 2 @, @ 800 m<sup>2</sup> ) canvas backdrop . The displays took place on an island in the middle of the Firework Lake , which also housed a small natural history museum . In keeping with Jennison 's desire for self @- @ sufficiency , the fireworks were made on @- @ site at Belle Vue .

The first display took place on 2 May 1852 , designed by " Signor Pietro " . The theme for the early displays was " battle enactment " , which proved to be popular with the paying public and resulted in Belle Vue becoming an all @-@ day entertainment venue . The firework displays incorporated real people and real weapons , some of which , 1866 @-@ vintage Snyder rifles , were issued to members of the local Home Guard during the Second World War . The first display , a re @-@ enactment of the Bombardment of Algiers involving 25 men , 300 rockets , 25 " large shells " , and 50 Roman candles , was watched by 18 @,@ 000 spectators .

The displays continued throughout the First World War , except that the use of rockets was prohibited under the Defence of the Realm Act . Reflecting contemporary events , the theme for the 1915 display was " The Battle of the Marne " ; in 1916 it was " The War in Flanders " , during which one spectator got so caught up in the action that he waded across the lake to join in with the " fighting " . Anticipating the outbreak of the Second World War , the theme for the 1933 display was " Air Raid on London " .

The last grand firework display took place in 1956 , on the theme of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men .

= = Circus = =

The first Belle Vue Circus took place in 1922 , but it was not considered a success . The next was staged in 1929 , after the company negotiated a deal with the Blackpool Tower Company to provide acts and equipment for what subsequently became a regular Christmas event held in the Kings Hall . One of the first arrivals from Blackpool was ringmaster George Lockhart , known as " the prince of ringmasters " . Lockhart became synonymous with the Belle Vue Circus , and his face was used on many advertising posters . Zoo superintendent Gerald Iles included some of the zoo 's animals in the circus , in a feature called Noah 's Ark .

For the 1967 ? 68 season , to celebrate his 39th consecutive year , the circus was temporarily renamed the " George Lockhart Celebration Circus " . Lockhart was the ringmaster for 43 years , until his retirement in 1970 at the age of 90 . His replacement , Danish @-@ born Nelly Jane , held the job for two years before being replaced by Norman Barrett , the last ringmaster . Another of the circus stalwarts was resident band leader and Belle Vue 's musical director Fred Bonelli , who started his career as a trumpet player for Barnum and Bailey 's circus band , and led various Belle Vue circus bands for 40 years .

Many of the acts featured animals , such as Eugene Weidmann 's mixed group of tigers and bears , Thorson Kohrmann and his Farmyard Friends , Willi Mullen 's Caucasian Cavalry & Ponies , Miss Wendy 's Performing Pigeons and Harry Belli 's Horse Riding Tiger ? to say nothing of the Dog ! As well as the animal acts there was the usual collection of acrobats , strongmen and clowns , two of whom , Jacko the Clown and his partner " Little Billy " Merchant , performed at Belle Vue for thirty years .

The last circus to take place in the Kings Hall before its sale was in 1981 . For a few years afterwards the circus continued in the car park , then in a marquee on wasteland directly opposite the gardens ' main gates on Hyde Road .

= = Sports facilities = =

Sporting events became a permanent feature at Belle Vue after an athletics stadium was built in 1887 .

= = Greyhound racing = =

Greyhound racing was introduced to Belle Vue in 1926 , in the UK 's first purpose @-@ built greyhound stadium , constructed at a cost of £ 22 @,@ 000 . It was built on land leased by Belle Vue to the Greyhound Racing Association ( GRA ) , a company chaired by Sir William Gentle , who was also the chairman of Belle Vue ( Manchester ) Ltd . The site was sold to the GRA in 1937 , with



the proviso that it had to be used for greyhound racing .

== = Speedway = = =

One of the activities that became synonymous with Belle Vue was speedway ( known at the time as dirt track racing ) , which was introduced on 28 July 1928 in the recently built greyhound racing arena . The sport proved to be very popular , and the decision was taken to convert the 1887 athletics ground into a speedway stadium , which opened on 23 March 1929 . It was at the time the largest purpose @-@ built speedway stadium in the country , possibly in the world . Eventually it became the first home of the Belle Vue Aces , but it was also used for many other events , such as football , cricket , rugby league ( Belle Vue Rangers ) , baseball , stock car racing and tennis . The stadium had covered accommodation for 40 @,@ 000 spectators . As the speedway bikes ran on wood alcohol ( known as dope ) , they were unaffected by fuel rationing during the Second World War and racing was able to continue , although many other attractions in the gardens were forced to close .

Belle Vue sold the stadium in 1982 , but speedway continued there until 1987 ; the final event was a stock car race , held on 14 November 1987 , shortly before the stadium was demolished after having been sold to the British Car Auction Group . The Belle Vue Aces returned to their first home , the greyhound stadium , where they had begun in 1929 .

== = Boxing and wrestling = = =

From the late 1920s until the outbreak of the Second World War , Belle Vue was " the boxing Mecca of Europe " . Bouts were held in the Kings Hall , and although popularity declined in the years following the war , Belle Vue staged a televised world championship fight in 1964 between Terry Downes and Willie Pastrano .

The first wrestling contest took place in the Kings Hall on 15 December 1930 , and proved to be a popular attraction . Except for a break during the Second World War , events continued to be held until 1981 , watched by up to 5 @,@ 000 spectators . Popular performers included Jack Pye , Big Daddy , and Giant Haystacks .

== = Rugby league = = =

The speedway stadium became the home of rugby league club , Broughton Rangers , who recruited international players including Frank Whitcombe ( who also worked in the zoo as a zookeeper ) , Billy Stott , and James Cumberbatch . When the club was taken over by Belle Vue in 1933 Broughton were given a 21 @-@ year lease for use of the stadium , at a rent to be based on attendances . The first Anglo @-@ Australian Test match of the 1933 ? 34 Kangaroo tour of Great Britain was played at Belle Vue , with the home side 's victory attracting approximately 34 @,@ 000 spectators .

Games were suspended during the Second World War , and on their resumption in 1945 the club was renamed Belle Vue Rangers . Belle Vue declined to renew the lease when it expired in 1955 as the arrangement was proving to be a " financial burden " , and the team was disbanded .

== = Football = = =

After a fire at Manchester City 's Hyde Road ground in 1920 , the club considered a move to the Belle Vue athletics stadium , but it was deemed too small . At the behest of Belle Vue director John Henry Iles and John Ayrton , Manchester Central , was formed , and played its home matches at the speedway stadium . One of Manchester Central 's first matches at Belle Vue was a visit by FA Cup holders Blackburn Rovers in September 1928 . The club attempted unsuccessfully to join The Football League in 1930 and in 1931 ; with momentum lost , the club faded , and folded in 1934 .

= = Present day = =

In 1963 the Top Lake , formerly known as the Great Lake , was filled in and a 32 @-@ lane ten @-@ pin bowling alley built on its site , just behind the Lake Hotel . Known as the Belle Vue Granada Bowl , it opened in 1965 , advertised as " the north 's leading luxury centre " . In 1983 , after the rest of Belle Vue had closed , it was sold to First Leisure Group , and bowling continued for a time . A snooker club was built in a corner of the car park in 1985 . All that remained of Belle Vue as of 2010 is the greyhound stadium and the snooker club ; the original gardens and amusement park are now an industrial and residential area . A road in the housing estate , Lockhart Close , was named after circus ringmaster George Lockhart .

In the aftermath of Manchester 's failed supercasino bid in 2008 , local groups began to lobby for the construction of a " linear park " in the area , building on " the legacy of Belle Vue " . It would have comprised a new zoo , deer park and amusement park .