

NOSTALGIA

The undisputed champion of entertainment in the north west

Nostalgia remembers some of Belle Vue's most famous visitors over the years, ranging from Sir Oswald Mosley to David Cassidy

BELLE Vue has a special place in the heart of every Mancunian lucky enough to ride the Bobs, make a splash on the water chute or enjoy an ice-cream or two on a hot, sunny afternoon.

It was the undisputed entertainment centre for the north west for more than 150 years, attracting more than two million visitors a year in its glorious heyday.

Bank Holiday weekends were especially popular. More than 170,000 people came through the gates on a single day in August 1949.

But who could resist the unbeatable combination of funfairs, firework displays, music, dancing, sports, boating lakes, greyhounds, bingo, beer and pies?

Belle Vue hosted the first greyhound meeting in the UK, the first dirt-track speedway races and one of the first-ever stock car events.

It was also home to England's largest bingo club and the largest teenage dance club – not to mention the largest exhibition space outside London.

Belle Vue truly was a fantasy destination just a bus ride away.

In fact, the magic of Belle Vue and

the Kings Hall in particular has enticed many a famous visitor over the years.

They range from the Halle Orchestra to Jimi Hendrix; from Fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley to the world's finest boxers.

Pop acts were as varied as punk band The Clash and teen idol David Cassidy, who played the Kings Hall just four years apart.

What Mosley would have made of either is hard to imagine.

A leading orator in England in the 1930s, he arrived to make a speech at Belle Vue in October 1934.

Mosley had been one of the Labour Party's more able members. He proposed bringing down unemployment by investing in public works programmes and the introduction of liveable pensions.

But the party stuck to its stark unemployment policies and Mosley resigned.

He formed his own New Party the next day along with six other Labour MPs.

The New Party fielded 25 candidates in the 1931 General Election but failed to win a seat. In 1932 it transformed into the British Union of Fascists which included

Mosley's bodyguard the Blackshirts.

The Kings Hall was packed with an audience of more than 8,000 for Mosley's address. Dressed entirely in black, Mosley thundered out his Fascist message from the stage. His Blackshirts were seated in every row, keen to defuse any trouble.

The meeting passed without incident, but there were skirmishes as Mosley's supporters marched back into the centre of Manchester.

Little trouble was expected when Shadow Foreign Secretary Harold Wilson and comedian Ken Dodd strode out to the centre of Belle Vue stadium for the Festival of Labour in July 1962. And so it proved.

The duo, accompanied in our photo by Festival of Labour Princess Sandra Farmer, entertained the crowd at the same time as delivering the party message.

Belle Vue stadium hosted its most distinguished visitor in May 1961. The Queen, accompanied by Major John Chartres, inspected the Manchester regiment there on her visit to the city.

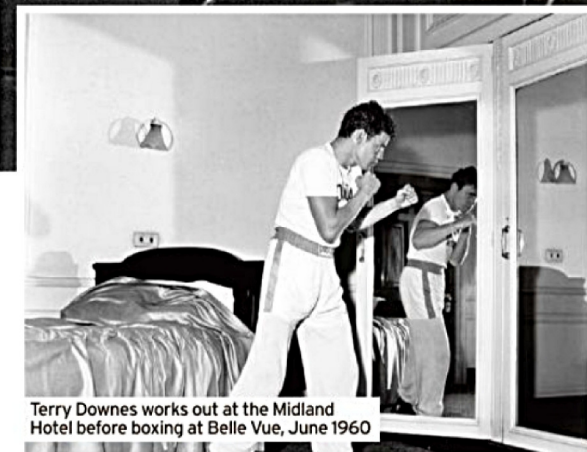
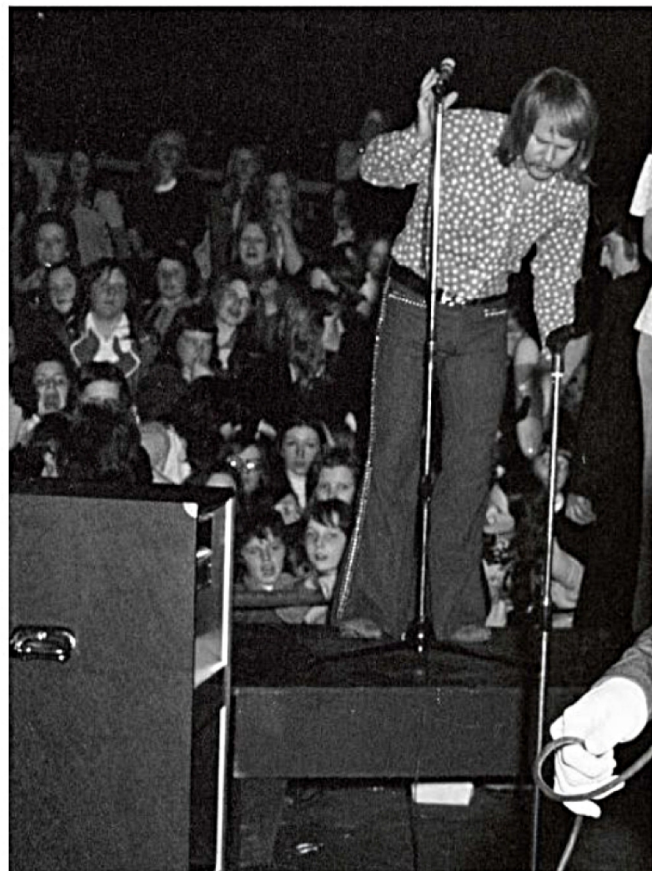
Smartly-suited French boxer Theo Medina arrived at Belle Vue to fight Lancashire's Peter Kane in September 1947. Our photo shows Medina and his wife with promoter George Dingley.

Kane won on points to become European bantamweight champion. He successfully defended the title against Italian Guido Ferracin at Belle Vue in February 1948, but was forced to retire in the fifth round when the two fought again at Belle Vue in July.

Former middleweight World Champion Terry Downes worked out at Manchester's Midland Hotel before fighting at Belle Vue.

He faced American Willie Pastrano for the light heavyweight world title at the Kings Hall in November 1964 – and was knocked down twice in the 11th round while ahead on points.

The referee controversially



Terry Downes works out at the Midland Hotel before boxing at Belle Vue, June 1960



Sir Oswald Mosley, right, arrives in Manchester before his speech at Belle Vue, October 1934

stopped the bout and Pastrano retained the title. It was to be Downes' last fight.

Probably the nation's favourite boxer – Henry Cooper – fought Brian London at Belle Vue in February 1964 for the vacant European heavyweight title and his own British and Commonwealth heavyweight belt.

After a big build-up in the press, the fight was decided in the first round when Cooper won on a technical knockout.

Peruvian-American soprano Yma Sumac sang to a capacity audience at the Kings Hall in June 1952 on her first tour of Europe and Africa.

Sumac was an international

sensation due to her tremendous vocal range – said to be over five octaves. She recorded several albums and had starred on Broadway.

Finally, American teen idol David Cassidy chose Belle Vue as the first UK venue for his 1973 European tour. There were two shows each evening – one at 5.30pm for the teenyboppers and another at 8.00pm for the older fans.

Fans screamed and fainted at both showtimes!

● Watch out for a brand new book on Belle Vue coming out for Christmas! Belle Vue - Second Edition by Clive Hardy will be available for pre-order soon!