Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

MORECAMBE IN THE 1930s

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 49

The 1930s were part of Morecambe's golden age as a resort, which continued into 1950s. Attractions and facilities expanded throughout the thirties.

The 1930s built on solid foundations from earlier decades. Central Pier opened around 1869, then lengthened in the early 1870s to reach 912 feet, a pavilion being added at the seaward end in 1898. West End Pier opened in 1896 and soon ran to 1800 feet, though fire and storm damage had halved its length by 1927. Neither pier has survived. See Guide 81 for more details about the piers.

The Winter Gardens (Victoria Pavilion/Pavillion), a huge theatre and music hall, opened in 1897 (see Guide 58) and the Alhambra music hall in 1901. The high capacity Promenade Station had opened in 1907 and faster road links to Lancaster (1922–3) and the A6 (1933) had been created.

Major hotels like the original Midland (formerly the North Western), Clarendon (1896), Grosvenor (1899) and Park (1900) were in place as was the central part of the current Promenade. Morecambe had merged with Heysham in 1928, and four years later the new Town Hall opened. Happy Mount Park, Morecambe's answer to Stanley Park in Blackpool, had opened in 1927. There were also theatres like the Royalty (1898) on Market Street.




The Midland Hotel, front and back

The 1930s did not begin auspiciously for the tourism sector. The Great Depression intensified in the early years of the decade and unemployment rose. A major fire destroyed parts of Central Pier in 1933, but a large ballroom was added in 1936.

Economic recovery later in the decade encouraged major investment in the borough. The best known was the new Midland Hotel. The original hotel on this site had opened in 1848, designed in a neo-Georgian style by Edward Paley of Lancaster. The LMS railway company commissioned Oliver Hill to design a new hotel in the then fashionable 'moderne' style that we would now call Art Deco. This was a hotel for the top end of the market; it was surprisingly white, sleek and curved. Eric Gill made the seahorses on the façade and inside a bas-relief and staircase ceiling. Eric Ravilious sculpted a mural and Marion Dorn designed striking carpets. Morecambe had seen nothing like this. The renovated Midland reopened in 2008 and so these delights survive.

The Art Deco style was not confined to the Midland. The Super Swimming Stadium (1936–76) was a very large outdoor swimming pool with similar clean lines, likewise the Harbour Bandstand and Band Arena next door. None of these has survived.

The Odeon cinema (1937) at the junction of Euston Road and Thornton Road was a major Deco addition to the town's many cinemas such as the Gaumont (formerly the Tower), Palladian, Empire and Arcadian, the latter two also Art Deco. Shops built for Woolworths and Littlewoods (1939) had the Deco look. On a smaller scale, Brucciani's and Lewis's ice-cream shops also demonstrated simple geometric patterns in their frontage and fittings.

The new Morecambe Grammar School (now Morecambe Bay Academy) was opened on Dallam Avenue in 1938 in the style one would expect.



The Super Swimming Stadium



The Art Deco style can also be found in several houses of the period. Many interwar bungalows and detached and semi-detached houses have hints of Deco, perhaps in stained glass by the front door, the bay window or staircase.

Perhaps the most extensive reminders of the Thirties in Morecambe are these, often spacious houses. They can be found extensively inland, east towards the Lune, north towards Bare and south in Heysham. The holidaymakers of earlier decades become the retirees in the Thirties and later.





Many of Morecambe's best buildings have succumbed to fire, storm, bankruptcy or changing fashion. These losses have included several buildings of the Thirties. However, many of those mentioned here have survived though often with changes to their fabric and uses.

Morecambe is a new town. The villages of Poulton-le-Sands, Bare and Torrisholme only united officially under the name of Morecambe (borrowed from the Bay) in 1889.

It is therefore not surprising that investment in Morecambe often come from outside the borough; in the Victorian/Edwardian era from Lancaster and Bradford (from where many holidaymakers came) and in the thirties from Blackpool.

The latter included Mrs Maud Bourne who in 1937 built the Broadway Hotel (recently demolished with flats on the site) and what are now the Strathmore and Headway Hotels in a distinctive brick style seen widely in Blackpool.

There was also Harry Schoichi Kamiya from St Anne's who built Middleton Tower Holiday Camp in Art Deco Style (1939). It later became Pontins and is now the site of a retirement village.



The Odeon cinema in its heyday and today

This short guide has been able to highlight only a few of Morecambe's notable surviving buildings from the 1930s.

Do walk around the town to spot more gems or join one of Peter Wade's walks. Peter Wade's guide *Echoes of Art Deco* is excellent for further reading as is Clare Hartwell's *Lancashire: North* in the revised Pevsner series (2009).

Text and photographs – Gordon Clark (except the photograph of the Odeon in its heyday by Robert Wade and the Super Swimming Stadium from www.lostlidos.co.uk).
Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2015; revised 2022).
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434