



ART DECO BOURNEMOUTH WALKING TRAIL

A 1-HOUR WALKING TOUR

Bournemouth underwent massive redevelopment between 1918 and 1939 and therefore probably has more prominent interwar buildings than any other seaside resort.

This walk features some of the best buildings of the Art Deco period to be found at the British seaside, many of which were designed by local firms. It will take you no more than an hour.



WHAT IS ART DECO?

Art Deco was one of the main architectural styles employed between the two World Wars, so it has become a useful term for describing the brave new buildings of that era. It takes its name from the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts held in Paris.

This introduced a new style of design which both challenged and played with the historical models of Classical and Italian Renaissance after the First World War. It typically used geometric forms with additional inspiration from the American jazz age and ancient Egyptian motifs, following the 1922 discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun.

Alongside Art Deco, the other key new style was Modernism. From the early 1930s, leading European Modernist architects brought their



ideas for clean white, functionalist buildings to Britain. With slick curved façades and lots of glass, Modernist structures are often described as being streamlined. In this they were also influenced by the design of ocean liners, like the Queen Mary, which epitomised 1930s glamour and luxury.

The two styles developed from quite different starting points but by the mid-1930s were often being combined, especially at the seaside. The popular Art Deco sunburst pattern was linked to the fashion for sunbathing, a trend reflecting the new social freedoms of the 1920s and 30s. This was also seen in the flat roofs and suntrap balconies of Modernist buildings.



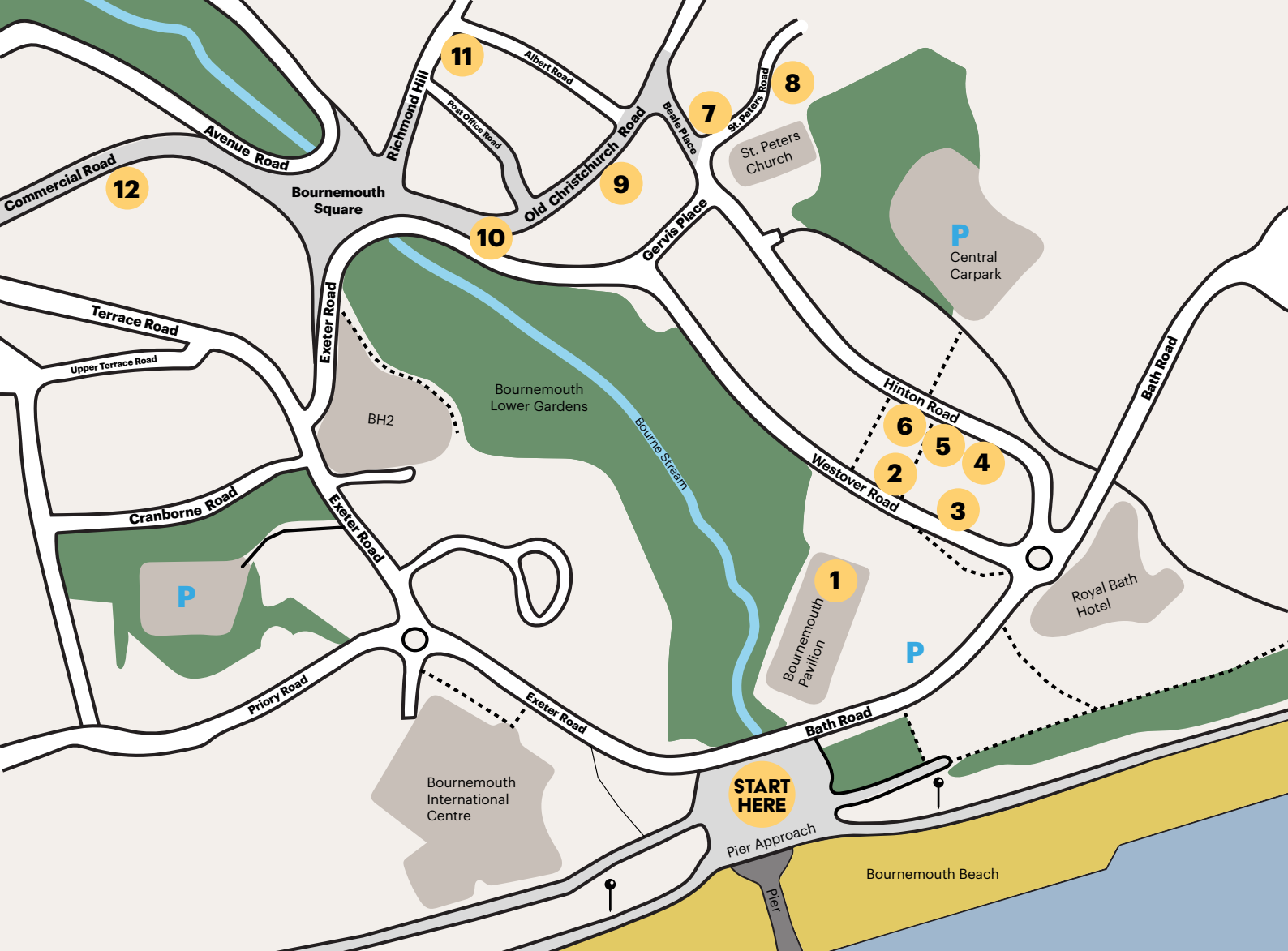
INTRODUCING AJ SEAL

During this walk we'll see a lot of buildings designed by Arthur John Seal (1886-1970). During the 1930s, he altered the face of Bournemouth with Modernist buildings that were praised for their freshness and originality. He was born

in Derby and trained as an architect there before moving to Bournemouth in 1910.

During the First World War he served with the Royal Flying Corps and later went into partnership with the architect Philip Hardy, before heading his own

firm of A. J. Seal and Partners from 1933. The impact of Seal's work was evident when, in 1932, coachloads of tourists visited the white Modernist house that he designed for himself to have their photographs taken outside.



GETTING STARTED

This trail starts and finishes at Pier Approach in front of Bournemouth Pier.

Start by standing with your back to the pier. Look across to the right and the large building you'll see in front of you is the Pavilion Theatre (1) – this is the first stop on our tour.

Cross Pier Approach, head inland (underneath the flyover) and into Bournemouth's Lower Gardens.

For a step-free route turn right immediately after the flyover and make your way round onto one of the Theatre's terraces (keeping the Theatre on your right). There is a lift on this terrace that will take you to the front of the building. If steps aren't a problem, then keep going ahead into the Lower Gardens and then cross the Bourne Stream by the bridge on the right onto the Theatre's terrace. Keeping the Theatre on your right, you can then climb the steps to the front of the building. (66 steps in total)





1. Bournemouth Pavilion Theatre

Westover Rd, BH1 2BU

G Wyville Home and Shirley Knight designed the Pavilion in 1923, using red brick and stone in a simplified Classical style popular at the time. On a sloping site, the building was made up of two parts linked by internal side corridors and outdoor stairs next to the gardens.

Facing the pier, the Pavilion provided a well-lit ballroom and restaurant. On Westover Road, the upper concert hall was quickly converted into a theatre staging plays as well as musical performances under its distinctive pyramid roof. The interior decoration mixed ancient Egyptian and Greek motifs with Art Deco forms. Opened in 1929, it cost £250,000 (approximately £19 million today). At 11,300 square feet this is one of the biggest ballrooms in the UK.

Many famous acts have performed at the Pavilion including The Kinks, The Who, Pink Floyd, David Bowie and Eric Clapton. It's still a popular location for concerts, exhibitions, and other events.

From the car park, look over to Westover Road where you can see some of Bournemouth's best inter-war buildings. In the 19th century this was a street of villas with large gardens. In the early 20th century a few shops were built, but a major transformation began in the 1920s.

Cross the car park and look across to the other side of Westover Road. You'll see a building with a colonnaded balcony right in front of you. This is the former Odeon Cinema (2).



2. Former Odeon Cinema

Westover Road

Movies were the mass media of the 1920s and 30s so it was common for cinemas to be built close to each other. The Italian-Renaissance style Regent Theatre was designed for Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Ltd by William Edward Trent, assisted by Arthur Seal and Philip Hardy. Like the Pavilion Theatre opposite, it opened in 1929. Its façade is decorated with faience tiles (a hardy form of glazed pottery) and has a tall loggia (a covered outdoor gallery) in front of the upper floor. The original 2,267 seat auditorium had an orchestra pit and Wurlitzer Organ. It was refurbished to make two screens in 1969, one of which was curved in shape providing audiences with an impressive 146-degree field of view. It was split into a six-screen Odeon in 1986 but closed in 2017.

To the left of the cinema is the former Westover Ice Rink. This shows Arthur Seal and Philip Hardy embracing Art Deco in a façade with distinctive ziggurat-shaped windows. The 10,000 square foot ice rink was built over the showroom of Westover Motors and was considered an exciting new attraction when it opened in 1930. The building is now a gym.

Further again to the left is the narrow white façade of the Westover Super Cinema. Although not much to look at now, it had a stunning concave Art Deco façade with a central illuminated fin when it opened in 1937. Behind this was an impressive 2,515 seat auditorium. Renamed the ABC in 1958, it was divided into two screens in 1969. For a while it was the last ABC Cinema in the country until it closed in 2017.

To the right of the former Odeon Cinema is a hotel, which was originally part of the Hinton Road Car Park (6). We'll see this later.

Turn to your right and walk a short distance to stand in front of the Premier Inn (3). This is the former Palace Court Hotel.



3. Palace Court Hotel

Westover Rd, BH1 2BZ

This new hotel opened in 1935 and provided the latest in luxury accommodation. A. J. Seal and Partners created an eye-catching front of streamlined suntrap balconies that gave the building a fashionable ocean liner look. The ground floor originally housed shops with a members' club, bar and restaurant above as well as 70 rooms featuring bedside telephones and private bathrooms (still a novelty at that time). Flats on the upper floors had kitchenettes but residents could also order meals from the hotel dining room. The Beatles stayed here in August 1963 when they performed 6 nights at the Gaumont Cinema (the former Odeon Cinema). A photo taken inside the hotel of the Beatles was used on the cover of their second album 'With the Beatles'.

Cross the road (to the Premier Inn side) and walk up the road (to the right) until you reach a mini-roundabout. Turn left and walk along Hinton Road. This may not look the most exciting of areas but be patient – there are some interesting Art Deco buildings to see here. It's best to cross to the other side of Hinton Road for the best views.

Look out for the tall brick wall on your right-hand side. Almost opposite the end of this wall you can see the Former Little Theatre (4)



4. Former Little Theatre

Hinton Road, BH1, 2AP

This was designed by Seal and Hardy and opened in 1931. The three stepped Art Deco windows above the entrance have been covered but the outer 2 are still visible behind the dark glass. When the Palace Court Hotel was built, Seal created a new access route from Westover Road and the venue was renamed the Palace Court Theatre. The auditorium survives and is being restored by Arts University Bournemouth.

Next door to the former Little Theatre is Palace Court Chambers (5)



5. Palace Court Chambers

Hinton Road, BH1, 2AP

This streamlined office building of 1933 was designed by A. J. Seal and Partners who occupied its upper floors. The window frames were originally painted green, offsetting the white cement render of the façade in a favourite 1930s colour combination. On the left side of the building, the windows follow the angle of the internal staircase.

Continue walking ahead along Hinton Road. Next door to the Palace Court Chambers you'll see the now-closed Hinton Road Car Park (6)



6. Hinton Road Car Park

Hinton Road, BH1, 2AP

Art Deco wasn't only about glamorous houses and hotels – it also included car parks. The growing number of cars during the 1930s meant that parking facilities were needed at seaside resorts, particularly during the summer. The former Motor Mac's Garage of 1932, designed by Seal and Hardy, was one of the earliest in England. Originally entered from Hinton Road or Westover Road, the far half of the garage (on Westover Road) was later converted into hotel accommodation. This steel-framed, 6-storey car park was designed for 900 cars on 13 staggered levels. The original Hinton Road façade is strikingly plain but is decorated with faience (glazed pottery) tiles and retains its original metal-framed windows.

Continue walking up Hinton Road for about 200 m. Keep a look out on your right for no. 11 Hinton Road. This was the mid-1930s office of Philip Hardy who, with Arthur Seal, was the architect of many of Bournemouth's Art Deco buildings.

You'll come to the magnificent St Peter's Church on your right. Here Mary Shelley – the author of Frankenstein – is buried in the churchyard. When you reach St Peter's Road stop to look at the Mary Shelley pub (7) opposite.



7. Mary Shelley Pub

The Quadrant Centre, BH1 2AD

In the 1930s, this part of Bournemouth was an area rich in department stores. Beales (on the left) had a magnificent 1931 Art Deco building but this was destroyed during the Second World War (the building you see now dates from the 1950s). Another was the department store of J. J. Allen (a small retail group formed in 1860). The site of the Mary Shelley pub was a separate part of the store dealing with house furnishing, carpets and removals. It probably dated from the late 19th century and was rebuilt in a modern style (and on a larger scale) during the mid-1930s.

Look right (along the side of St Peter's Church) and you'll see another Art Deco building. This was the former Maples Department Store (8)



8. Maples Furniture Store

37 St Peter's Rd, BH1 2JZ

Until the 1930s, the east side of St Peter's Road was occupied by St Peter's Church School. This was demolished to make way for new buildings including the 1937 Maples furniture store. It is built of stone with large windows set within metal surrounds employing distinctive Art Deco motifs. In 1993 the interior was damaged after 2 firebombs planted by the Irish Republican Army exploded in the basement. Although the store reopened, the company went into liquidation in 1997. During the 2000s, the building housed bars in the ground floor and basement which, in 2007, were frequented by Prince William while he was stationed at nearby Blandford.

Go back to the Mary Shelley pub and after the pub turn right along Beale Place. You'll come to the pedestrianised Old Christchurch Road (a busy shopping street).

Turn left and walk down the hill. Stop outside MacDonald's (on the right) and look across the street to the former House of Fraser department store.



9. Former House of Fraser department store 14-24 Old Christchurch Rd, BH1 2AA

In 1871 Frederick Bright opened a shop selling needlework and Berlin wool. Over the following decades it was enlarged, including in around 1905 by a block with an iron-framed elevation on to Gervis Place. In the early 1920s Bright's store was provided with a new façade on Old Christchurch Road by the local architects Reynolds and Tomlins. This features early examples of the sunburst motif common in Art Deco (with a slightly Egyptian feel) in the bands in the windows marking each floor level, and in other faience tiles supplied by Carter and Co. of Poole. The shop was taken over in 1969 by House of Fraser but closed in 2022. It is due to be converted into student accommodation.

Walk down Old Christchurch Road, where you'll come to the edge of Bournemouth Square. Look out for the last building on the left (currently ICrack) which unmistakably belongs to the Art Deco period.



10.2 Old Christchurch Road (currently ICrack) BH1 1LG

This curved, three-storeyed building, again by the architects Reynolds and Tomlins, was designed in 1936. Its detailing seems to have been inspired by major Modernist works such as the influential 1933 Midland Hotel at Morecambe. Photographs of the late 1930s show that it was a Dolcis shoe shop.

Behind the building is a red brick tower with an Art Deco feel which was built in 1938 as an extension to the Plummer Roddis department store. Plummer Roddis was a chain formed in 1896 with branches around the south-east of England. The Bournemouth store closed in 1973 and the building is now Roddis House. You can get the best view of this tower by crossing the road (Gervis Place).

Now retrace your steps and walk up Old Christchurch Road again for a short distance. Look out for Post Office Road on your left and walk along this road. Keep going for about 100m until you reach Richmond Hill (with a large church on the corner). Turn right here. A short way up the hill (past the church) you'll see a building with 'Echo' written on it.



11. Former Bournemouth Echo newspaper building

18 Albert Rd, BH1 1BZ

The Bournemouth Echo is the town's local newspaper. Its offices are another work by Seal and Hardy. The main façade on Richmond Hill steps up to a striking Art Deco tower with 3 elongated windows that light the staircase behind. Stripes of black vitrolite emphasise the entrance and the building's corners are finished with streamlined curves. From 1934, newspapers were printed here using 15 two-ton Linotype machines installed underneath the offices of the Echo journalists. The author Bill Bryson began his career at the Bournemouth Echo and worked in this building.

Now turn left and walk down Richmond Hill. You'll arrive again in Bournemouth Square – an open pedestrianised space.

Keep bearing to the right and walk round the corner onto Bourne Avenue. Walk along here and you'll see several interwar buildings including Hampshire House (probably 1935) and Hampshire Court (the upper parts of which appear to date from the late 1930s).

For a step-free route retrace your steps to Bournemouth Square, and then bear right again across the square. Then follow the road to the left until you reach Clark's shoe shop.

Alternatively, opposite Hampshire Court there are steps down into Bournemouth's Middle Gardens. Walk straight across the gardens. After you've passed over the Bourne Stream, turn left. As you come out of the park you'll see Boots opposite. Next to it (behind 2 trees) is Clarks.



12. Clarks

16 Commercial Road, BH2 5LP

This former Burton store of 1936 is in the distinctive mid-1930s style of the company's Architects Department headed by the Chief Architect Harry Wilson. The use of polished granite on the façade (with 3 principal windows with polygonal heads separated by moulded fins) appears in several contemporary shops in other towns.

You've now reached the end of the tour. Head back down to Bournemouth Square. Cross the road to enter the Lower Gardens and walk back towards the sea. On your left you'll get a good view of the Roddis red brick tower (10).

As you walk through the Lower Gardens, keep a look out for the Bandstand on your left built in 1933. At the end of the Gardens you'll arrive back at the pier.



Close to Bournemouth Pier, marked with pins on the map, are two other interesting Art Deco buildings to see.

Happyland

West Undercliff Promenade, BH2 5AA

Standing in front of the pier, looking out to sea, walk to your right (past the Aquarium) for about 100m.

Happyland Amusements was originally a bathing station providing changing rooms and costume hire. It was designed by the town council and opened in July 1939.

Harry Ramsden's

East Beach, Undercliff Drive, BH1 2EZ

Standing in front of the pier, looking out to sea, walk to your left for a short distance.

What is now Harry Ramsden's Fish and Chip shop is the former East Beach Café built by the town council and opened in June 1935.

If you want to see more Art Deco buildings outside central Bournemouth, you may want to visit these buildings.

Pearl Assurance House

128-130 Old Christchurch Road, BH1 1NL

At the junction of Old Christchurch Road with Fir Vale Road, this six-storey Modern Movement office building of 1937 was designed by the architects McGrath & Goodesmith and is clad in ceramic tiles by Carter and Co. of Poole.



The former Bournemouth Gas and Water Company Showroom

709 Christchurch Rd, Boscombe, BH7 6AF

Built in 1935, this Modernist building was designed by Seal & Partners in a form recalling the Palace Court Chambers (5). The glazing of the rectangular stair tower is particularly noteworthy.

Lansdowne House

Christchurch Road, BH1 3JP

This former Odeon Cinema was designed by George Coles. It is set in a long, brick block of flats over shops. The cinema contained almost 2000 seats. It opened in 1937 and was later used as a bingo hall.

Cumberland Hotel

27 East Overcliff Drive, BH1 3AF

This Modern Movement building was completed in 1938 by local architects Rowley and Partners working for Mrs E. A. Phillips of London. After use by the army during the Second World War, it was, in 1949, the largest Kosher hotel in Europe.

San Remo Towers

Michelgrove Road, Boscombe, BH5 1JY

This unique block of 164 flats has a penthouse and office, over a basement garage for 130 cars. Constructed in 1935-8 by the American architect, Hector O. Hamilton it brought a touch of Californian glamour to the Dorset coast.

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