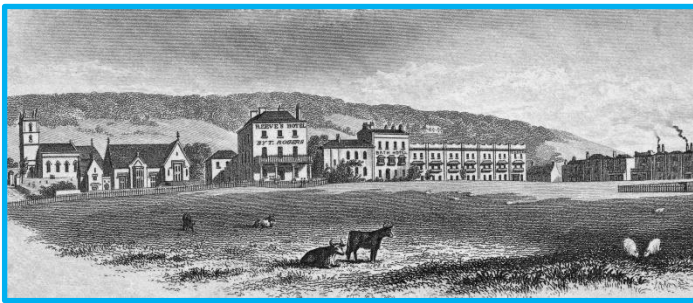




The Winter Gardens

A Winter Gardens, a year round leisure and entertainment venue, was first suggested for Weston in 1881. Rogers' Field on the seafront, belonging to the Royal Hotel, was seen as the best site. It was already used for fairs, fetes and the occasional circus. However, the Rogers family who owned the hotel were unwilling to sell.



Rogers' Field in the 1840s © courtesy of Weston Library

The Summer and Winter Gardens were built instead on the Boulevard, opening in August 1882. They remained until the site was rebuilt as a theatre in 1918. New plans to build on Rogers' Field in 1914 were scuppered by the outbreak of World War I. It wasn't until 1922 that the local council compulsorily purchased the land, at a cost of £2,640.

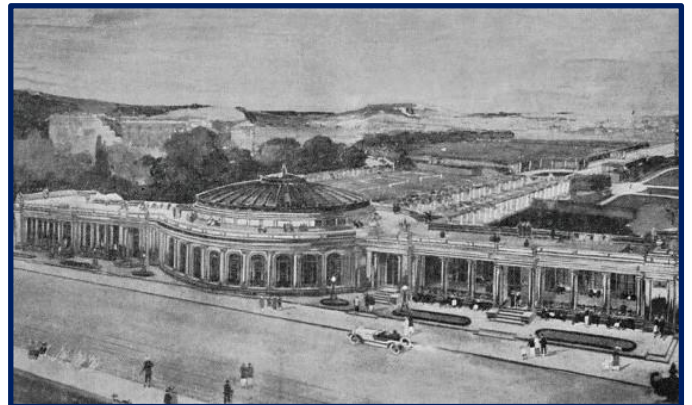
Shelters, terraces and a rose garden were initially planned for the field, but this was not exciting enough. A new design, which included a domed pavilion, was approved in January 1924. The costs of buying and developing Rogers' Field were met by Henry Butt, a local businessman. Landscaping alone was to cost £16,000.

Work began in 1924. The Italian Gardens, facing High Street, were completed first. An elegant terrace wall of Portland Stone, 200 feet long, separated the gardens from the putting green. Weston's Town Surveyor, Harry Brown, found the terrace by chance. It was bought with money supplied by Henry Butt.

The Putting Green, Rose Garden, Alpine Garden and Lily Pond were opened to the public in August 1925.

Turf from the original Roger's Field, already sea-washed and salt air resistant, was used on the 18-hole putting green.

The Pavilion, designed by Harry Brown and the architect T.H Mawson, was built in 1927 at a cost of £35,000. The Rogers family had instructed that any building on their former land was to be no higher than 40 feet. The domed roof was flattened, and the ballroom floor inside dug below ground level, to keep within the height restrictions. The ballroom featured an advanced coloured lighting system, earning the Pavilion the nickname "House of a Thousand Lights".



An artist's impression of the planned Pavilion, 1924 © Weston Mercury

The Winter Gardens & Pavilion were officially opened in July 1927. The gates to the gardens were unlocked with a golden key, which is displayed here in the Seaside Gallery. Miss Hilda Ward & Her Ten Lady Syncopators played at the opening ball.

The Pavilion was a popular venue for dancing and light orchestral concerts in the 1920s and 1930s. Its popularity continued after World War II, into the 1950s and beyond. Episodes of the BBC's original ballroom dancing show – Come Dancing – were filmed there. Young Dancers Night, later changed to Teen and Twenty, was held on Wednesday evenings during the 1950s.



The Pavilion at night, 1954 © courtesy of Weston Library

There was rock 'n' roll, ballroom dancing and novelty dances such as the Conga and the Hokey-Cokey. Vernon Adcock & His Orchestra was the resident band on Saturday nights, and there were often special guests. Everyone dressed up, and the ballroom was always packed.

Valerie first went to the Pavilion in November 1961. She jived to the big band sound of Ken Macintosh with a young man who later became her husband. Saturday night dances remained a regular event for the couple, with big names such as the Ted Heath Band and the Syd Lawrence Orchestra providing the music. Valerie will always remember the great atmosphere and the revolving glitter ball over the dance floor!

The Pavilion has hosted many of the biggest names in music. The rock 'n' roll star Gene Vincent performed in 1963. He was followed by chart-toppers such as Billy Fury, The Hollies, Manfred Mann, Cilla Black, The Animals and Pink Floyd. Elton John, then known as Reg Dwight, played piano in one of the backing bands.

WINTER GARDENS

Nightly at 8 p.m.
(except Monday and Saturday)

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ORCHESTRA
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ROY EDWARDS **VERNON MIDGLEY**
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and Special Sunday Guests—
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Sat.	DAVID BOWIE	75p
Sun.	THE VERNON ADCOCK SHOW	40p, 45p, 50p
Mon.	PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING	35p - 75p (res.)
	MAL KIRK v. TIBOR SZAKACS and Sensational Tag Match — THE MAGNIFICENT MAGYARS v. THE SEPIA SET with Supporting Boys	
Tues.	SOUNDS OF MUSIC)
Wed.	THE MINSTREL SHOW)
Thurs.	OLDTIME MUSIC HALL) 40p, 45p, 50p
Fri.	SPOT THE TALENT, Junior and Senior Contests)
Sat.	ATOMIC ROOSTER	70p

THE STARLIGHT ROOM
MUSIC HOUR — Tuesday to Friday at 11 a.m.
ENTERTAINMENT NIGHTLY at 8 p.m.
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(Sunday from 2.30 p.m.) Tel. W-s-M. 29512

A poster advertising David Bowie's visit to the Pavilion © Weston Mercury

More big names came in the early 1970s: Marc Bolan & T-Rex, Roxy Music, Black Sabbath and Status Quo are a few examples. David Bowie performed at the Pavilion on July 1st 1972, during his Ziggy Stardust tour. A ticket cost 75p!

The Pavilion continued to host concerts, dances, conferences and exhibitions. Boxing and wrestling matches were also popular events. Huge running costs, however, meant the building lost large amounts of money every year. In 1981 the council proposed options ranging from alteration to demolition, but backed down after public protests.

The Winter Gardens have gone through many changes since the 1970s. The Alpine Garden was grassed over and planted with roses. The Pavilion's colonnaded wings – originally partly open to allow access from the beach to the gardens – were glazed. In 1989 the Prince Consort Hall was built over the tennis courts.

In the early 1990s, the putting green and most of what remained of the original gardens disappeared under the Town Square and the Sovereign Shopping Centre. In 2017 the Italian Gardens' stone terrace was dismantled and used in a revamp of the square. Thankfully the Lily Pond, with its stone pergolas, survives.



The Winter Gardens Pavilion today © Roger Cutler

In January 2015, as part of regeneration plans, North Somerset Council agreed to sell the Pavilion to Weston College for £1. The 1989 extension was rebuilt and became a law and professional services academy, opening in September 2017.

The elegant Pavilion was restored and kept open for community use. It continues to host events, and is part of Weston's history as a major seaside resort.

