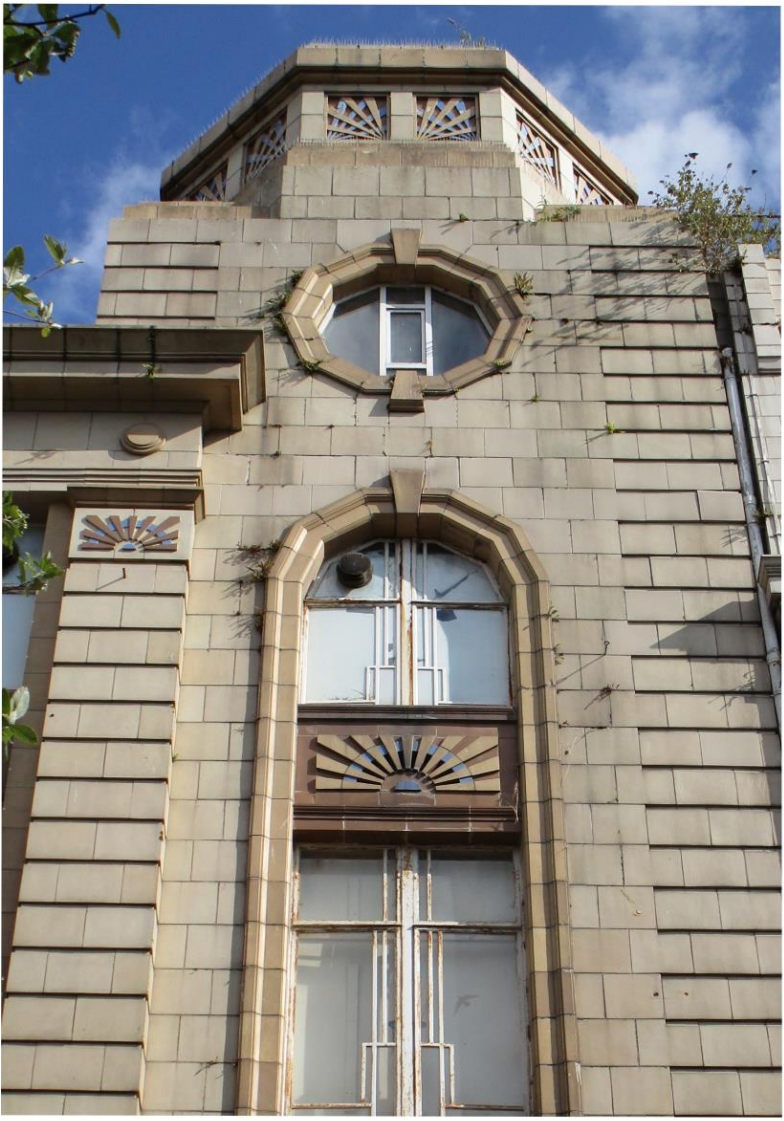
DORSET DECO



BUILDINGS
IN THE
ART DECO
STYLE
IN
BOURNEMOUTH,
POOLE &
CHRISTCHURCH

BY
JAMES RATTUE

DORSET DECO

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Front cover: Brights, Commercial Road, Bournemouth

Frontispiece: Sunburst sink overflow cover, Portland House, Weymouth

Back cover: Bourne House, Hinton Road, Bournemouth

Why Art Deco?

Now typically, my tastes in art, architecture and design incline towards the pointed arch and the flying buttress, the umbrageous signifiers of the Gothic. Art Deco is *nothing* like that. Art Deco, the style that began in France just before World War One and swept across the world over the next twenty years until petering out (substantially) under the impact of another war, has nothing in common with Gothic apart from its stylisation. It was forward-looking, optimistic, and humanist. It believed in a better world, and a *sort* of better world that would arise not from grandiose social engineering but from the interactions of human beings, aided by new technology.

Between 1928 and 1930, the founder of the *New York Daily News*, Joseph Medill Patterson, commissioned a new home for the paper on the city's 42nd Street, a 36-storey tower nearly 500 feet in height. Its main doorway was surmounted by a bas-relief carving; 'God must love the poor, he made so many of them', Abraham Lincoln had allegedly said, and this sculpture set out to depict them, the *News*'s intended audience: beggars, builders, girls in cloche hats and a boy with a dog, a patrician in a top hat and a cop in a cap. Above them all, the sun radiates the rays of beneficent modernity over a skyscape of towering buildings. There's the Art Deco sensibility encapsulated in one image: we move forward, honouring the weakest among us, and what we do as persons, to the utmost of our art and talent, will advance us all. It is both socialist and individualist.

It's nice to have a bit of optimism every now and again: I suppose that's what's at the centre of my fondness for Art Deco. Exploding out of the experience of war, pandemic, and economic slump, the style insisted that human beings mattered, and that human skill and belief in beauty could make a difference. At first, this conviction was expressed in expensive materials and careful artisanship, in elaboration and sumptuous decoration; as time went on, the sub-style dubbed *Streamline Moderne* took over, its emphasis all on line and curve, geometry and shining surfaces, preparing the ground for the austere modernism that would come later. Streamline Moderne conditions the general view of Art Deco far more than the earlier, more elaborate version, and in fact we'll see how the public as a whole seems to associate the style with a limited colour palette and a repertoire of effects

– black, white, red; lines, mirrors. Contemporary Art Deco revival buildings almost always organise themselves around these elements.

Some are adamant that Streamline Moderne is an entirely different style, and get irritated when it's referred to as 'Art Deco'. I see Streamline as the translation of Art Deco ideals into cheaper, mass forms. Streamline applied art is still, fundamentally, *decorative*, because the elements that distinguish it are not driven by necessity and practicality in the way that Modernism is: those curving windows, fins, canopies and ribs are all dispensable, far from the purity of form Modernism strives for. Art Deco never aims at simplicity even when it achieves it; that's what unites 'Arts Decoratifs' and Streamline Moderne as parts of Art Deco, and separates both from Modernism.

In Dorset, we'll find very little in the way of early 'Arts Decoratifs' style, but we certainly will discover Streamline buildings, elements, features in common with them that crop up on structures that are not really that Deco at all, and modern interpretations too. All are fun, and spotting them increases our sense of how our communities have developed. I did my original sweep of the area a long while ago now, starting in the early 2000s. Many of the buildings I saw then have been altered, some to the point that you would no longer pick them out as anything unusual, and some have disappeared completely, but that itself leads to interesting reflections on how vulnerable aspects of our built environment can be.

The Setting

The southeastern corner of Dorset is where most of the county's urban development has gathered. Arguably, much of it isn't 'proper' Dorset at all, only having joined the county since 1974, but the River Stour forms a natural eastern boundary for Dorset before the outskirts of what becomes the New Forest begin, an area with a very different history and feel. There are three major settlements here, completely separate for the great majority of their history but formally conjoined since 2019 in one local authority area: it's known as 'BCP', not 'Book of Common Prayer' as an Anglican might assume, but 'Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole'. The amalgamation might seem a bit of a shame given the very different trajectories these towns had followed for centuries, but it was a belated

recognition of the fact that for decades all three had blurred into one another and their boundaries on the ground were a very notional matter.

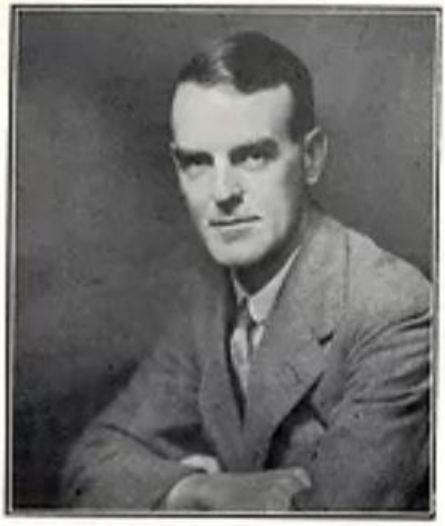
Christchurch is the senior of the three towns, an Anglo-Saxon *burh*, port, and market centre, which was eventually transformed by the addition of a castle and a mighty priory church, causing the change of name from its original *Twynham*. Poole to the west grew up from the 12th century as the importance of the port of Wareham declined; it became one of the busiest ports on the south coast, commanding the huge natural basin of Poole Harbour. Sandwiched between them, Bournemouth is the newcomer, developing out of a scatter of settlements from the mid-1800s and developing into a holiday resort. All three grew rapidly towards one another in the 20th century, eventually merging until it was impossible to recognise any objective point where each town became the next.

Poole and Christchurch preserve a lot of older architecture in their centres; in more modern Bournemouth, 1920s and 1930s style is far more represented than in its more venerable neighbours to either side, jostling for attention with Victoriana and Edwardian buildings. In all three towns, the rapid growth of new estates and outlying roads between World Wars One and Two is reflected in a suburban Art Deco presence there, albeit only sometimes in the form of the odd motif. Of the three, Christchurch has the least, but it's still discernible in places. Covering the whole of the county would be a bit much, but I have a few examples of Art Deco from other Dorset places I'd like to share with you.

AJ Seal, 1886-1970

Although other architects played their part, no name is associated more closely with the Dorset conurbation's Art Deco buildings than that of Arthur John Seal. Mr Seal was an architect and surveyor originally practising from Victoria Park, Winton, before going into partnership with Philip Hardy at Hampstead House, Yelverton Road, from at least 1921. In that year they designed a new hall for the Congregational Church in Charminster, an undistinguished redbrick Gothic building which looked like umpteen others that had been built over the previous four decades. A decade later, however, they were gearing up to radically changing the face of Bournemouth and having a dramatic effect on parts of Poole.

The team's first essay in this respect was the relatively modest Palace Court Theatre in Hinton Road (1931), a blocky Portland Stone building with three step-topped front windows and a deeply-recessed main doorway (fig.1). It was plainly ripped off from the far grander Whitehall Theatre in London, which had been designed by Edward Stone only months before. In the same year, Seal & Hardy won the contract to design the Westover Road Ice Rink, built over the Westover Garage by its owner, Major Sharp, so his children would have somewhere to learn to skate: its dramatic stepped windows, echoed in the interior, were supposed to suggest icebergs, a typically Deco visual pun (fig.2). A couple of years later the firm was contracted to build the offices for the *Bournemouth Echo* on Richmond Hill, so very impressive a building that it led to a flurry of commissions for work in a similar style (see pp. 26-7). AJ Seal & Partners was established in 1933, based in offices which they designed in 'Palace Court Chambers', next door to the Palace Court Theatre: 'a refreshing departure from traditional norms', said *The Architect and Building News* that year, which in 1936 could be found heaping praise on the firm's Palace Court Hotel on Westover Road (fig.3): Mr Seal was 'an architect who can truly be said to have altered the face of Bournemouth', pointing out that Seal & Partners had also designed the adjacent buildings. The hotel's towering nine storeys and continuous horizontal balconies spanning the whole frontage made a powerful statement. The town centre buildings were followed by outlying ones such as the Water & Gas Company headquarters at 709 Christchurch Road (see pp. 30-31), and the Harbour Heights estate in Sandbanks (see pp. 21-2), and farther afield Seal & Partners remodelled the Seabank Hotel at Porthcawl in 1934 and (probably) the Queens Hotel at Torquay in 1937. A 1939 private commission for, it is said, a Señor Cabañes from Spain, Bel Esguard in Bury Road, Sandbanks, survives. Such was the



A. J. Seal, Esq., L.R.I.B.A., Architect.

prominence of Seal designs that, when he wrote the Dorset volume of *The Buildings of England*, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner simply assumed that the firm had produced the Art Deco houses on Banks Road in Sandbanks, as well as Harbour Heights.

Although the Art Deco style wasn't entirely snuffed out by World War Two – Bristol & West House in Bournemouth dates to 1950 – its postwar manifestations lacked the swagger of the 1920s and 30s, and Mr Seal, being no fool, moved with the times. Virtually his last major building before retiring in 1951 was the new Canford Cliffs Hotel (now The Cliff in Ravine Road), replacing a larger structure burned down during a wartime bombing raid. It's such a conservative design that it looks as though it could date to about 1905; perhaps that's what the client wanted.

Some of AJ Seal's Bournemouth town centre buildings have suffered. His YMCA building has been refaced, reglazed, and its rear slathered with multicoloured paint. The frontage of the Palace Court Theatre is obscured with the dark glass left over from its time as a church, and awaits re-conversion into a theatre by Bournemouth Arts University; and Palace Court Chambers next to it, where so much amazing work was done, is a wreck (fig.4). The Majestic garage and multi-storey car park adjoining that is battered and weary (fig.5). But the Palace Court Hotel is still dominating (provided you look above the ground floor), and Seal's buildings elsewhere sail on, bearing the Deco style into the future. His grandson and great-granddaughter are also architects, working from Poole as Seal Designs.

Motifs

Art Deco relies for its distinctive effects on a repertoire of elements which can make it possible to spot a building from the era even when a lot of the rest of it has been changed. Here are some of the common features.

Curves

Art Deco buildings create an impression of speed and modernity with curved elements – towers, balconies, parapets, and bays. In the case of the little green-painted house at 19 Braidley Road in Bournemouth, the sweeping balcony is the main clue to the building's date, but the flats at 71-73 Sea Road in Boscombe, a dramatic white block, move back from the

road in four successively recessed curved steps, with a matching parapet on top of the roof. These were originally two properties – 71 was 'Iona' and 73 the Marlborough Hotel. At the bottom of Old Christchurch Road in the town centre, no.2 – currently the iCrack mobile repair shop – is *all* curves, jetting down to the foot of the hill, with a two-stage canopy over the entrance and the stepped brick mass of Roddis House towering behind it. (figs.6-8)

Central masses, staircase towers, step designs

Drama is a central concern of Art Deco architecture, and it generates it, where space and cost allow, by massing physical elements. One of the most noticeable features is the glazed staircase tower, placed centrally, off to one side, or symmetrically where there is more than one. The post-War Bristol & West House on Richmond Hill in Bournemouth has a tower on the corner, topped with decorative horizontal fins, while the flats at 964 Castle Lane, Castle Court, have two, one over each entrance. Other buildings step up blocks to a central culmination. Lansdowne House on Christchurch Road, which housed the Odeon cinema from 1937 to 1974, is a particularly grand example, four storeys of flats flanked by square stair towers and a central series of steps climaxing in a tiled upright fin. Waterfront House (30 Pearce Avenue, Poole) looks as though it might possibly be an Art Deco revival building, but its glazed ground-floor apse to one side suggests an early date – perhaps it's been extensively modernised. It has an irregular massing of box-like stages finishing in a tower above the flat roof. A cheaper way of achieving the same effect was to put a step design into the parapet around a roof, or adding a stepped gable; you can see this at 32-34 Haven Road in Parkstone, a building helpfully dated '1933' on the front in case you hadn't noticed. A lot of commercial buildings in the conurbation have similar details. The humblest example I've yet found is a tiny industrial building on the Turbary Common estate, nominally numbered 506 Wallisdown Road, with an unnecessary and very characteristic stepped gable end, which has even been repaired in recent years. I suppose it's so small that repairing it wasn't that demanding a job! (figs.9-14)

Decorative glasswork

Coloured or translucent glass in geometric designs often appears on Art Deco buildings; Dorset examples are on the back elevation of the old cinema

at 711-15 Wimborne Road in Bournemouth, or 34 High Street, Poole, the former Julia's House charity shop and now a café (in fact the glass is the only clue to the building's date). Even when it isn't patterned, Deco glass expresses a sense of modernism and technology. The stairs tower at Beacon House, 15 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, is illuminated by long strips of glass with diagonal glazing bars; the Poole Labour Club, an otherwise very austere brick structure on that town's Wimborne Road built to commemorate the centenary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1934, has a lovely round window incorporating a sort of Maltese cross design on its 'tower'. Cedra Court in Westby Road, Boscombe, is a small gem which has retained the two columns of fluted glass either side of its front door. The glass on Deco buildings, however, is especially vulnerable, as we will see. (figs.15-18)

Sunbursts

Nothing epitomises the optimism of Art Deco more than the sunburst design which appears on so much 1920s and 30s applied art, from textiles to domestic appliances. We see sunbursts in tile form on 14-24 Old Christchurch Road in Bournemouth (see pp. 24-5), while a more unusual application is in the gate of 19 Braidley Road. It's amazing that this has survived! (fig.19)

Pre- and Post-War

We typically associate Art Deco with the 1920s and 30s, but the style did just about survive World War Two. Nevertheless, it emerged looking rather different: it was simpler and by-and-large less dramatic – unless sheer scale made it so.

Beales was Bournemouth's biggest department store, founded by John Elmes Beale in 1881; in about 1920 Mr Beale acquired Okey's drapery store on Commercial Road, which was rebranded as 'Bealesons'. Both stores were revamped in Art Deco style. In 1931 the main premises was turned into a towering seven-storey emporium with round arched windows, patterned glazing, recessed windows and what seems to be a hexagonal corner tower rising above the rest of the building. Meanwhile, the rebuilt Bealeson's was more horizontal, on three storeys with a stepped frontage and a flagpole on the top of the building. The flagship store only lasted twelve years until being destroyed in a WWII bombing raid in 1943. Its early-1950s

replacement still curved its way around the corner of Old Christchurch Road, and its size meant it could hardly fail to impress, but while it was recognisably within the Art Deco tradition, it was a severely stripped-down relative of the family, a block of seven simple courses of relatively small windows bookended by even simpler blocks in a lighter material – there was almost nothing *decorative* at all. The Bealesons building survives, albeit split into different properties now; while it was occupied by HMV its whole frontage was covered by tinted glass, so at least now you can see it. (figs.20-22)

Just around the corner from Bealesons is another prime example. Woolworths opened their Bournemouth store at 18 Commercial Road in 1915, and rebuilt it in 1931, the same year as the reconstructed Beales and the Palace Court Theatre. The new store frontage, with long windows on the upper storeys and two 'towers' at the ends, seems to have been built with a curious asymmetric kink to follow the line of the street. It had recessed window mouldings and fluted decorative elements. This structure fell victim to an incendiary bomb in 1941, though the buildings to either side – including the very striking black-tiled Burtons store at no.16 – were undamaged. Photographs from 1952 show that even then Woolworths was still operating on just one storey, but soon afterwards it was rebuilt to its original height, yet in a very different style. The new frontage was a single block faced in Portland stone, with two rows of continuous windows on the upper storeys: it could barely have been any simpler, like a kind of memory of what it had been like pre-War. Strangely, when Boots took the building over in 1983, they made it slightly more elaborate, adding horizontal chrome bands and tiny blue decorative roundels, but these were later stripped off again and the whole frontage painted white, a sadly drastic solution to what was merely dirty stonework. (figs.23-26)

The Vulnerability of Deco

Of all the original Art Deco period buildings in the BCP conurbation, just three are protected by official Listing: the Brights building on Old Christchurch Road in Bournemouth, the former *Echo* offices on Richmond Hill, and 117 Poole High Street (Oliver Hill's 'Landfall' in Mount Crichel Road is a Listed 1930s house, but is more Modernist than Deco). This means all the rest are vulnerable to change or even demolition. Very often

Art Deco buildings are not recognised for what they are, and small commercial or residential structures may have features which don't look that unusual, meaning they are easy to sweep away. The most vulnerable aspect of Deco buildings, perhaps, is their glasswork. Curving windows or thick decorative glass panels are inconvenient, inefficient and expensive to replace compared to flat glass; unless a property-owner is very committed indeed to preserving the character of a historic building (and has the money to do it), the pressure to replace period-style steel- or aluminium-framed glass with double-glazing is irresistible. Salterns Court in Lilliput is a very prominent building from 1935 combining ground-floor shops with flats facing towards the sea to the rear (fig.27). Its soaring, boxy central staircase tower had when built a single arched window spanning three floors, decorated with tracery in swirling patterns: now it has three dull, plain windows illuminating the three landings inside. When I compiled my list of Deco buildings for my old website, I included 75-77 Castle Lane West in north Bournemouth, a pair of nice little houses facing each other with circular glazed staircase towers at the corners; at that time no.75 retained its tiny blocks of decorative glass on the ground floor. All the glass has now been renovated and made much less characteristic. (figs.28 & 29)

Perversely, even when an owner knows what an Art Deco building is and likes the style, it seems to bring its own dangers. It appears that, for some enthusiasts with enough money to renovate their period buildings, the genuine article isn't Deco *enough*: such owners are sometimes tempted to recast their properties in the Art Deco style of their imagination, refashioning the real thing according to a fantasy of what these structures *should* be like. One small area of Poole has some particularly startling examples.

A lot of the most vulnerable Art Deco buildings are small commercial properties that were never very grand to begin with, and may have only a motif or two that dates them; as businesses move in and out and update their premises, such details are prone to be disposed of. When I first saw it, 62 Ashley Road in Parkstone was Tasty Plaice Fish & Chips, an Edwardian brick shop that clearly had a stepped Deco frontage added in the 1930s (fig.30); it's still a fish and chip shop, but in different hands, and the upper stages of the frontage have disappeared while new signs obscure the detailing on the front, meaning there's nothing that identifies this building as unusual. It's a similar story at 186 Seabourne Road in Southbourne (fig.31). This looks as though it was once very similar to the Edwardian buildings either side of it, before being given an additional storey and a new

brick frontage with concrete detailing between the first-floor bay window and the new one above, all topped with a canopy and what looks like a base for a flag. When no.186 became an Italian restaurant, Villa Toscana, the interior of the building was refurbished; the jazzy external signboard was replaced by a low arch echoing the new fittings inside, and the detailing on the bay was covered up. Unlike 62 Ashley Road, you can still see what the building is, but it's not as striking as it was.

Similarly, Castle Court in Iford can still be picked out as an Art Deco building, but changes have been made that make it less distinctive. It's been repainted in shades of grey; the glazed doors and the long windows lighting the staircases have been replaced, the glass much reduced; all the building's windows have been refitted with UPVC double-glazing. On the other hand, the intrusive signs above the ground-floor shops have been removed, revealing some Streamline curved moulding.

Which brings us, as warned, to Salterns Way in Poole. The buildings in the waterfront residential area around Sandbanks and to the north show a lot of Art Deco influence: white paintwork, curved ship-like elements, porthole windows, and rooftop railings all have maritime associations appropriate for a district of yachts and marinas, and we see them copied in modern buildings locally too. When I first visited Salterns Way and the neighbouring streets in the early 2000s, I found a little treasury of small, unpretentious Deco houses. A follow-up in 2018 revealed a very different prospect.

The building that had survived unscathed was no.12, South Haven (fig.32). On the other side of the road were three houses, nos.9 (interestingly unusual with a chocolate-brown band of tiles below the roof-line), 11 (named 'Seascape', boxy with a pale green band round the middle), and 13 (being replastered and partly refaced when I saw it). Something over a decade later, and no.9 had gone entirely, while Seascape had moved from boxy to curvy, acquiring an integral staircase tower with a long, multi-lighted window which must have cost a fortune, and had been extended up a storey; no.13, renamed 'Decadence', had also been heightened, *its* staircase tower incorporated within the outline of the building, and (like Seascape) its original windows replaced – with green-tinted glass. (figs.33-35)

Further along, no.30 had been a modest house with a glazed staircase tower and horizontal windows; now, it's hardly recognisable, its tower apparently the only thing surviving within the footprint of the new no.30,

bigger, higher, and more glamorous, with tinted glass and balconies on two levels. No.32 is now its mirror-image, connected by a curving canopy, the houses' upper storeys sitting over car ports below. (figs.36 & 37)

No.1 Salterns Way was the humblest little building in the assembly, identifiable as Deco really only by its detailing and stepped masses, and, even at the time of my first visit, it could have done with a bit of TLC and a lick of paint. Instead it was demolished wholesale, replaced by a Modernist experiment which isn't Deco at all, even if its porthole windows are trying to hint in that direction. (fig.38)

Round the corner in Lagoon Road, no.9 – 'Lucky Star' – was a boxy little creation, already reglazed but still '30s, with a nice staircase to the front door and original ironwork. By 2018 that had gone. The outline of the house had been tidied up and a bay frontage added, the staircase replaced by a partly-sunken garage topped with a balcony screened by blue-tinted glass. There was even a new stepped front wall. All more Deco, apparently, than Deco itself. (figs.39 & 40)

The most notorious redevelopment of this kind is not far away – 227 Sandbanks Road, called Rialto before its remodelling in 2004. In the refurbishment, featured on Channel 4's show *Property Ladder*, a top storey was added, but although I prefer the old cream-and-brown colour scheme, its replacement by white and pale turquoise isn't too objectionable and the exterior was pretty much respected apart from some of the windows being enlarged. It was the violence done to the interior, losing a genuine 1930s staircase and fireplace, that stung. (figs.41 & 42)

Deco Preserved

When I first photographed 711-15 Wimborne Road in Winton, it was a bingo hall, but, like many such buildings, it began life as a cinema: from 1935 to 1963 it was the 1500-seat Moderne, pretty big for a suburban picture house. Inside, the main colour scheme was cream and turquoise, though it had leopard-skin carpeting changed to green in the 1950s. The interior abounded in rounded corners, columns, glinting chrome fittings – and a grand main staircase like a film set in its own right, its massive dividing wall surmounted by four great turquoise columns up to the ceiling. During the Moderne's bingo-hall incarnation, the central fluted decoration on the

frontage was covered with signs, and the curving first-floor windows facing the street were replaced with standard house bay-windows. After the bingo hall closed in 2008, the Cinema Theatre Association applied to English Heritage for the building to be Listed, but the request was turned down because too much of the interior had gone. That paved the way for the Moderne to be adopted by the Bournemouth Community Church who, in fact, did a splendid job of adapting and restoring it. The décor is now dazzling white, with black accents and lots of chrome; the staircase has been restored; the front windows reverted to curves (albeit with slightly brutal aluminium glazing bars); two mirrored hoops have been added to the frontage, and the front canopy is now a curved black line swooping across the whole building. The church's name is on a vertical sign down the middle of the front fluting, in 1930s lettering. It's all been achieved with a genuine feel for the building, and the church is to be congratulated. (figs.43-46)

A much humbler Art Deco building respectfully adapted to a new use is Cedra Court in Westby Road, Boscombe. Originally a hotel, Cedra Court was converted to 15 flats in 1995, with the frontage almost completely preserved. The curving front windows were (almost inevitably) replaced with UPVC double-glazing, but at least the small panes follow the curves, and everything else has been kept, including the two columns of fluted greenish glass set in black-painted mortar supporting the canopy over the front door; maintaining these is a lot of work, for which the developers are to be commended. The porch side windows have good stepped mouldings, and those are still there too. (fig.47)

Our last 'preserved' building falls into a third category, an industrial structure. This is the spectacular Lion Works at 543 Wallisdown Road. Here, everything survives: ranges of small glass blocks flanking the door (as at Cedra Court, only more of them), curving windows with original glazing bars, and above the door a vertical fin which presumably once bore the name of the company that built the place, topped with a statue of a lion. It's even got stone lions on the columns of the side gate. Whatever the history of the building, since 2021 it's housed an independent school for children with autism spectrum disorder. (fig.48)

Modern Interpretations

We've already mentioned instances in which changes to Art Deco buildings reveal what designers, and the public in general, think such structures are, or should be, really like. The Cumberland Hotel on Bournemouth's East Overcliff is a fine example. Outside, it looks the part in glorious if quite restrained style. The whole building, virtually unchanged since the hotel's construction in 1937, is a shiny white block decorated with narrow horizontal black bands on balconies which project forward from the main mass in three symmetrical steps; it looks strangely like a giant radio set or some other such appliance. The silver lettering on the front has been through several incarnations, all in the same 1930s idiom. It's the interior that makes the visitor gape, though. The lobby is a study in black, white, red, and chrome, and nothing else. The hotel's monogram is boldly laid into the floor; there's a stepped mirror over a black-and-white decorative recessed fireplace, red and black chairs, and a house carpet in a radial Deco black-and-white pattern. The lift is black and mirrored, and contained – when we visited – a chair in a zebra-stripe fabric. I can well imagine an Art Deco designer insisting on zebra, but not necessarily sticking it on an 18th-century balloon-back armchair. It's striking that this astonishing interior represents what people think Art Deco *is*. (figs. 49-52)

Lots of modern properties around Sandbanks incorporate Art Deco features, but very few follow the style through consistently. One of the ones that does is 72-74 Banks Road, right on the lumpy bit at the bottom of the Sandbanks peninsula. This is really spectacular for a domestic building, built in 2008-9 to replace a former guesthouse and in fact a block of 8 flats, though it disguises its nature by an irregular, asymmetrical arrangement of masses. The central block and staircase tower, and the area over the car bays, is in dark grey-brown brick, while the rest is cream-white, with curved balconies and corner windows, entrance canopy, and even a flagpole at the top of the tower. The white-painted garden wall is in style too. To judge by recent estate agents' photographs, there's nothing very period in the interior, but the outside of this building displays a very striking translation of Deco conventions into a modern setting. (fig. 53)

Opposite 'Rialto' in Marina Drive, and presumably inspired by that refurbishment, no.2a was completely rebuilt in 2014. It had been an unsuspecting mid-20th-century bungalow but is now a white Art Deco pastiche house with a long stairs window and a nice stepped parapet above

it, a curving bit of wall, and pale blue livery. It's rather pleasing, though it has to be said that, again, judging by estate agents' photos there's nothing very Deco inside it: it's just elegantly neutral. (figs. 54 & 55)

A Dozen Buildings

1. 117 Poole High Street

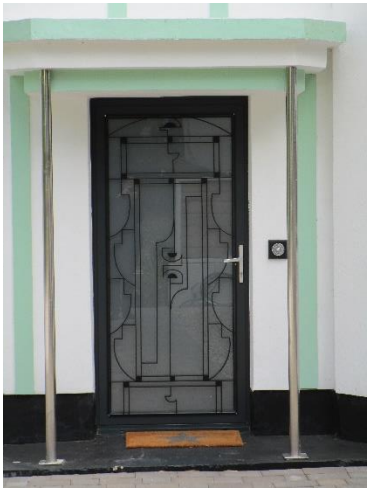
The best small Art Deco commercial property in the BCP conurbation, thankfully this building is now Listed, so when TK Barbers took it over from long-established bakers Bennetts in 2021 they had to respect the existing features, and just redecorate the fantastic jazzy signboard rather than remove it. The history of this little property explains why it's survived: from 1921 to 1951 it was occupied by Joseph Bright, and then Bennetts took it on, so it has had a century's continuity of ownership by two conservative family businesses. Bright & Sons were Britain's champion bakers (however that was defined) in 1937 and 1938, and perhaps redesigned the 19th-century shop to celebrate. As well as the painted signboard, the shop has inward-curving front windows with original glazing bars, decorative glass, and wood surrounds, resting on plinths of black marbled stone. The shop name is laid into the flooring, and Bennetts never removed that either. It's an amazing survival.

2. The Poole Park Ice Cream Kiosk

As is our next building. In the late 19th century, the vast Canford Estate stretched down from Canford Manor itself to the outskirts of the old Borough of Poole, and has left a number of legacies including the very easy-to-spot Tudor-style estate cottages scattered all across that area. Another is Poole Park, opened in 1892 for the recreation of the citizens of the town. Planning permission for an ice-cream kiosk was granted in 1922 but it wasn't built until 1945, yet despite the replacement of the roof at some point the survival and simplicity of this building makes it worth noticing. In its blue and white livery it almost looks like an ice-cream tub itself, which I suppose may be the point. There may only be three Art Deco buildings *specifically* Listed in the BCP area, but the whole landscape of Poole Park is Listed, so this little structure has more protection than it would otherwise have.

3. 223 & 225 Sandbanks Road

Less flashy than the refurbished 'Rialto' round the corner in Marina Drive (see p.15), these two houses nevertheless form a nice little pair of domestic buildings which stand out from the unremarkable properties alongside them. They share a basic outline, but one is more curves and one is more angles; they also share a driveway, so I imagine have a common origin and builder. Since I first visited the houses about twenty years ago, the palm trees and bushes have grown up making no.223 harder to see; also, both houses have had a bit of a spruce-up, perhaps encouraged by the experience of Rialto adjoining. No.225 now has pale green bands and a new green door with a jazzy pattern that looks the part, while no.223 retains its old glazing bars and curving windows; it used to have a slightly blueish tinge, but both houses are now painted shiny white.



4. Harbour Heights, Sandbanks

I made a great mistake with Harbour Heights when I put together the selection of Art Deco buildings on my old web pages, not realising that what the visitor sees now are structures of different dates. There are several buildings here: Harbour Court, the Harbour Heights Hotel, and Conning Towers – two blocks, one of which is part of the original development by AJ Seal & Partners from about 1935, and a second which dates to 1999 and was built by David Quigley Architects to fit in with the style of the rest. Finally, lower down the hill is Harbour Close, two rows of very plain single-storey houses – each basically a cube.

Conning Towers old block (1935), with new top storey

The hotel has been somewhat butchered by the addition of a mansard roof, but in the rest of the estate you can still appreciate what even Pevsner, usually so sniffy about anything that wasn't pure Modernism, called 'a brave and enterprising group' of buildings. Harbour Court (originally named The Haven) still has its roof parapet, curves and bay windows; the new block of Conning Towers strikes out towards Poole Harbour in a series of three sweeping balconies; and just above it is the original Conning Tower, which an article on the redevelopment in *Building Design* in 1999 stated 'must easily have been the flashiest house

Conning Towers new block (1999), with its balconies

The main doorway of Harbour Court

on this stretch of coast. In addition to seven bedrooms and servants' quarters it had its own cinema and a large cantilevered sun-lounge with a circular column incorporating built-in loudspeakers operated from the principal receiving set in the living room'. After a spell as a convalescent home run by the Wellcome Foundation, the Conning Tower was in danger of demolition when it was reconstructed, its interiors entirely remodelled apart from the staircases. A penthouse floor was added 'to make the investment add up', angled to distinguish it from the original work beneath. It's the modern block that is most visible from the road below (and which deceived me all those years ago into thinking it was the genuine article), but you can just catch a glimpse of the original Conning Tower above the bushes, and view its rear elevation from the drive. Overall, Harbour Heights may have been fiddled about with, but the estate retains enough swagger to make it a striking testament to its epoch.

5. Banks Road houses

Down Haven Road from Harbour Heights and on the left is the Sandbanks peninsula, a long sand spit extending across the mouth of Poole Harbour. What became Banks Road, running along the spine of the spit and looping round the bit at the end, was laid out in the 1890s, but it didn't begin to be developed until a generation later. There are several Deco-styled houses; my favourite is no.59, a striking structure with its curves, staircase tower, swooping roofs and dining-room floor which seems to be entirely glazed; however, I have a suspicion that this is possibly a rather modern building. The glazing has certainly been replaced if it *is* old. Those who prefer their Deco more definitely *period* should examine the blocks of flats called Utopia and Sandbanks Court a few doors up. Also look out for the very humble little no.89, a 1930s house but a far cry from the big, flashy

buildings at the north end of the peninsula. The buildings along Banks Road are often demolished and reconstructed, so it's very pleasing that no.89 has held out this long. Pevsner speculates that some of the Banks Road houses were designed by AJ Seal, but he says that of any 1930s building in the area and we know that other architects *were* perfectly capable of knocking up a house in Deco style.

'Utopia'

Sandbanks Court

89 Banks Road

6. ‘Brights’, 14-24 Old Christchurch Road

That last point is proved as we move eastwards to Bournemouth and survey the magnificent prospect of ‘Brights’. This building looks more colossal than it really is, its massive towers flanking a frontage faced in cream-coloured tiles made by Carter & Co. of Poole, that cover up the 1905 department store which grew out of Frederick Bright’s haberdashery of 1871. In the mid-1920s, long before Mr Seal got going in the Deco style, it was a different firm of Bournemouth architects, Reynolds & Tomlin, who designed this soaring, exuberant structure – if truth be told, the only obvious example of the earlier *Arts Decoratif* incarnation of Art Deco in the area. The window dividers are decorated with that most Deco of motifs, the sunburst, and there are more sunbursts – or rays, at any rate – on the towers, in cream and blue.

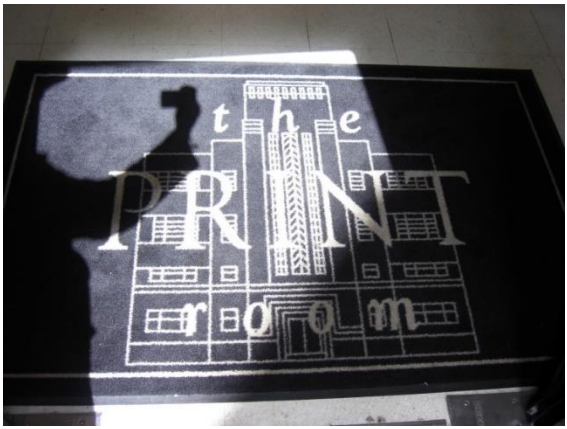
The new frontage coincided with Brights' expansion, when it acquired a range of similar department stores across the southern counties, before in turn being bought out by JJ Allen in 1960. In 1969 House of Fraser bought JJ Allen, and in 1972 the stores Fraser owned in the West Country were rebranded Dingles after its big store in Plymouth, before the name House of Fraser began being used for all the stores in 2006. This quite typical story for regional department stores has continued through the economic strain of recent years, and with a sense of inevitability the old Brights finally closed in March 2022. The building now looks thoroughly worse for wear – but still magnificently grand, a statement from an age of confidence and hope. At least it's Listed Grade II, so some good use will hopefully be made of it.

Reynolds & Tomlin made another striking contribution to Dorset Deco in the form of the HQ of the Bournemouth & Poole Electricity Supply Company, nearby in Yelverton Road. Now housing a variety of businesses, this is a rather super *moderne* building of 1932, surmounted by a clock beneath a recessed semicircular arch with decorative moulding. Sadly it lost its original window glazing bars relatively recently, as well as the proud title 'Electric House' surrounding the clock – you can't get more Art Deco than a name like that, like something out of *Metropolis*.

7. The *Echo* Offices, Richmond Hill

Just uphill from The Square in Bournemouth stands the ziggurat-like splendour of Seal & Hardy's early-30s masterpiece, the offices of the *Daily Echo*: like cinemas and electrical showrooms, there's something very Deco-era about newspaper offices. They stand for information and citizenship. The *Bournemouth Daily Echo* had been founded in 1900; its home is one of the most startling and dramatic buildings of its time, not just in Bournemouth, but provincial England generally. Here, AJ Seal designed a structure that built up in a series of steps, from curved wings swooping round the corners of Yelverton Road and Albert Road, towards a truly monumental central tower flanked by giant pilasters and marked by continuous columns of chevron-glazed window from the first floor upwards. It isn't really all that big, but manages the trick of *seeming* huge by its deft use of mass, achieving an effect which calls to mind proper skyscrapers. This was the building which made Mr Seal's reputation, and understandably, too. The great clock projecting from the front is a bit rusty, but at least it's still there. *All* the metal window glazing bars survive. It's exhilarating to see.

Newspapers haven't needed hot metal for a long while, and in 2007 part of the building's ground floor was revamped by London-based architects David Archer as a bar and restaurant. The Ink Bar occupied the old reception area, and the Print Room restaurant, well, the printing room. The business marketed itself heavily on its Art Deco surroundings and a lot of the fixtures were retained. Nevertheless, everything was painted white, apart from the black metalwork and highlights of red-tinted strip-lighting. This colour palette, along with lots of mirrors, recalls what's happened at the Cumberland Hotel: it's what people currently believe Art Deco *is* (or at least, what they believed about 15 years ago). The Print Room was never a great commercial success and though its mirrored lettering is still outside, the *Echo* offices are now undergoing another refurbishment, creating (so it is planned) a new restaurant, flats, offices, and a gin distillery. The actual newspaper premises shrink and shrink!



8. St Peter's Gate

When it was built as a branch of furniture store Maples in 1937, the building which now seems to be called 'St Peter's Gate' would have gazed down St Peter's Road at its part-competitor Beales (see pp.11-12 & 40), and somewhat resembled it. The black metal sections between the windows not only create a strong visual contrast, but make it look rather like a white building has been slotted down on top of a black one. The strong vertical emphasis of the stone uprights, especially the central section flanked by buttresses, make it seem far more massive and striking than its actual size warrants. The ground floor has a curved canopy that swoops around the whole building and in fact beyond it, only coming to an end at no.43 where its final segment covers the entrance to the Maples loading bay.

Maples went into receivership in 1997; three years later the ground floor of St Peter's Gate opened as a nightclub and bar called Bliss, which survived until 2013. It would have reopened under new management, but its unhappy reputation decided the Council that it would be better if it didn't. Like so much of central Bournemouth, this glamorous building looks tired now, but its upper floors are now flats, lots of them forming student accommodation.

It's not alone. A cheaper building in brick and a little bit of stone just along the road, no.43, Bourne Chambers, has also become student housing. It has a central, deeply recessed staircase 'tower' with curving windows which doesn't look very different from the larger building's, and a very nice stone doorway with fluted decoration. That's genuinely 1930s, but further along still, no.55 (Sienna) is another block of flats which is definitely Deco-inflected, but only built in 2014.

Bourne Chambers

'Sienna', 55 St Peter's Road

9. Pendennis, 7 Derby Road

Amid the leafy avenues of Bournemouth's East Cliff sits this astonishing block of flats, its swoops and curves organised around that triumphant central staircase tower - a very common pattern in Deco buildings of this type. I found this as a result of an accidental turn down Derby Road, and was very surprised indeed to discover a building quite so dramatic and strong. It never seems to have been significantly altered, although Alwyn Ladell's beautiful collection of images of Bournemouth buildings on Flickr show that its detailing has been chocolate-brown in the past, while now it's cream. At least one of the flats had a fantastic tortoiseshell tiled fireplace and hexagonal windows in the internal doors; it was offered for rent in 2015, and photographs are still available online. The central upstairs lobby has a big oval ceiling window. Frustratingly few details about the building's history are available.

Pendennis is not alone: the central-tower pattern can be found in a number of blocks and hotels in surrounding streets, including Burley Grange in Weston Drive; Weston Grange in Gervis Road; the Majestic Hotel, further along Derby Road; and Berkeley Mansions in Christchurch

Road, along with others forming a really amazing collection of 1930s buildings crammed into this pretty small area.

10. 709 Christchurch Road

This building sticks out very incongruously among unremarkable Victorian and sub-Victorian Boscombe, its curves and staircase tower looking like a piece of architecture left over from a forgotten airport long since built on, as though *it* was here first rather than the other way around. Its glamour belies both its current quotidian use as a showroom for the vehicle accessory business Motabitz, and in fact its origins. This is another AJ Seal building, designed in 1936 for the Bournemouth Gas & Water Company – the head office was in Old Christchurch Road, while this premises was its showcase for goods and services. The building used to have lovely curving glass windows on the ground floor too, and the original narrow windows on the stairs tower have been replaced by wider ones, but we should be grateful that this utilitarian structure survives at all – and in fact looks tidier now than when I first spotted it twenty years ago.

11. Southbourne URC Church

It is rare indeed to find a church in an Art Deco idiom, but Southbourne has one in the form of the brick United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church on Southbourne Road. And a splendid instance it is, retaining the standard Gothic pattern of tower and nave, but filtered through a Deco style, hence the dramatic, soaring west window with its chevron glazing bars and round-headed arch, and concrete portals over the western doors. The masses of the structure are skilfully handled, and the building has an angled apse at the east end. Inside, the detail is an odd mixture of Deco, Art

Nouveau and Classical influences. The church dates from 1929, and (rather unusually for a Nonconformist establishment) used to have a statue of St Francis outside, sculpted by none other than Mary Seton Watts, widow of the brooding Victorian painter GF Watts; in fact it was at first called 'St Francis Immanuel' to distinguish it from the former, temporary Immanuel Church. Different versions of the statue were repeatedly decapitated by vandals until it was finally removed after 1995.

Pevsner is quite complimentary about the church (though his comment that it is 'a good example of its date' might be taken as a bit double-edged) but he gets the architect wrong. He gives it as the well-known Frederick W Lawrence, when in fact it was a local designer, Frederic Lawrence, whose office was not far away. He built other Congregational churches in Danbury in Essex, Oxted, and Ewell (both in Surrey), and all share similar features (the use of brick, and round-headed arches), but Southbourne is the grandest. He would have become architect of the London City Temple in 1948 but for his untimely death.

12. The Regent Cinema, Christchurch High Street

You could look at the Regent Cinema with your hand over the view of the central bay, and see nothing much about it to attract your attention: the building looks completely domestic, a humble two-storey brick structure with a green tiled roof. But remove your hand again and you see the point: that central bay instantly strikes you with its stepped gable, jazzy *sort of* sunburst decorative panel design, and very 1930s lettering. This cinema dates to 1931 though no photographs of it seem to date from before 1967 when it was brutalised, the decoration and the canopy over the entrance removed, and after that it only survived as a movie theatre until 1973 when it became a bingo hall for the next nine years. In 1982, with admirable foresight, Christchurch Council bought it, aiming at turning it into an arts centre that would include a revived cinema among other facilities. A series of reburbishments and extensions have produced what you see today; and thankfully the interior isn't all black and white and chrome, but plush and lush, including a red, wood-ceilinged auditorium with gold detailing, and a foyer and coffee-bar full of angles and strip-lights. Outside, a new curving white canopy edged in chrome couldn't be more appropriate. Christchurch is the poorest of our three towns for Art Deco, so it's very pleasing that it has the Regent.

Deco in Dorset At Large

We are mainly concentrating on buildings in the BCP area but it would be remiss not to give at least some hint of what may be found elsewhere in fair Dorset. So here are four buildings, one a utilitarian municipal structure, two rather grand and one very humble indeed.

We begin at the humble end of the scale with the former **Swanage Bus Depot** in Kings Road West in the town. This has a simple concrete 1930s frontage with a curving step at the top and a Greek key decorative device at the bottom of either side of the entrance. It's a bit run down and scheduled for demolition, but was still there when I checked last.

The old **Portland Urban District Council Offices** of 1934 is now a block of apartments called Yew Tree House. And 'block' is the right word: the building is a near-cube of grey Portland stone, with recessed mouldings around the windows and corners, and decorative panels between the windows on each storey. There's also a porch that looks almost Egyptian. English Heritage rejected the proposal to List the offices in 2012, citing especially the damage done by installing UPVC windows some time before, but it is recorded as an 'Important Local Building'.

Portland House in Weymouth is now owned by the National Trust but usually let out, and the public is only allowed in on special occasions. Externally the building (of 1935) is more Spanish villa-style rather than Deco, but inside it has many of the fixtures and decorative features which usually vanish from houses of this period, from doorways and fireplaces to a swooping bathtub that looks like an ocean liner and even an overflow cover with a sunburst pattern! (for which see the title page.)

Finally, just along the coast from Portland is the spectacular **Riviera Hotel, Preston,** once a bit dilapidated but spruced up as part of the developments for the Olympics in 2012. The Hotel, startling in its blue and white livery against the green hills, throws out two mighty curved arms of round-headed arches, and builds up in the middle to a tall square tower. There is nothing quite like it anywhere else. It dates from 1937.

Pictures

Fig.1 The Palace Court Theatre, Hinton Road, Bournemouth

Fig.2 Westover Road Ice Rink, Bournemouth

Fig.3 The Palace Court Hotel, Westover Road

Fig.4 Palace Court Chambers, Hinton Road, Bournemouth

Fig.5 Majestic Garage, Hinton Road, Bournemouth

Fig.6 19 Braidley Road, Bournemouth

Fig.7 71-73 Sea Road, Boscombe

Fig.8 2 Old Christchurch Road, Bournemouth

Fig.9 Bristol & West House, Post Office Road, Bournemouth

Fig.10 964 Castle Lane West, Bournemouth (before recent changes)

Fig.11 Lansdowne House, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth

Fig.12 30 Pearce Avenue, Poole

Fig.13 32-4 Haven Road, Parkstone

Fig.14 506 Wallisdown Road, Bournemouth

Fig.15 Glass at 711-15 Wimborne Road, Bournemouth

Fig.16 The former Julia's House charity shop, 34 Poole High Street

Fig.17 Beacon House, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth

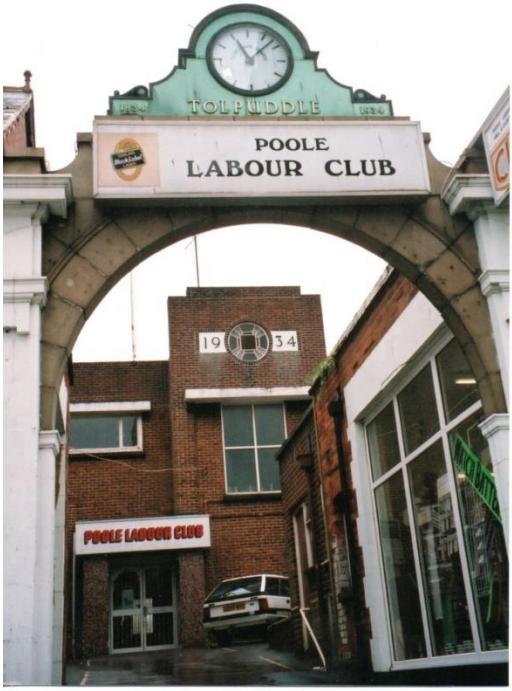
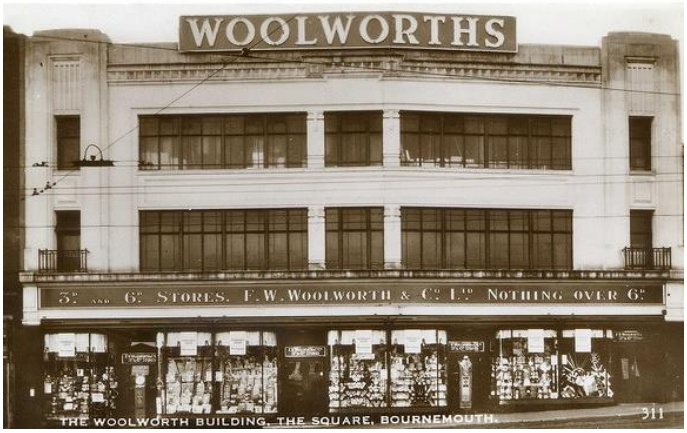


Fig.18 Poole Labour Club, Wimborne Road

Fig.19 The gate at 19 Braidley Road, Bournemouth

Figs.20 & 21 The old and new Beales', Old Christchurch Road, Bournemouth

Fig.22 Bealesons, Commercial Road, Bournemouth (and another Art Deco building at no.5)



Figs.23-25 The pre-War Woolworths store at 18 Commercial Road, Bournemouth, and its later versions as a branch of Boots. The blue and chrome details appear on branches of Boots elsewhere

Fig.26 18 Commercial Road, Bournemouth, formerly Burton's

Fig.27 Salterns Court, Lilliput, as it was

Figs.28 & 29 75 & 77 Castle Lane West, Bournemouth

Fig.30 62 Ashley Road, Parkstone

Fig.31 186 Seabourne Road, Pokesdown

Fig.32 South Haven, Salterns Way, Lilliput

Fig.33 9 & 11 Salterns Way (former state)

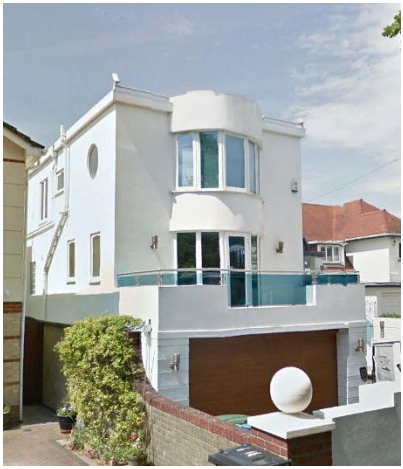
Fig.34 11 & 13 Salterns Way (former state)

Fig.35 11 & 13 Salterns Way (current state)

Fig.36
30 Salterns Way (former state)

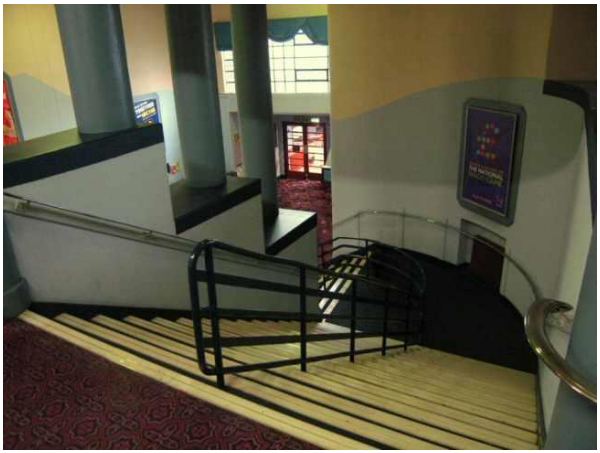
Fig.37
30 & 32 Salterns Way (current state)

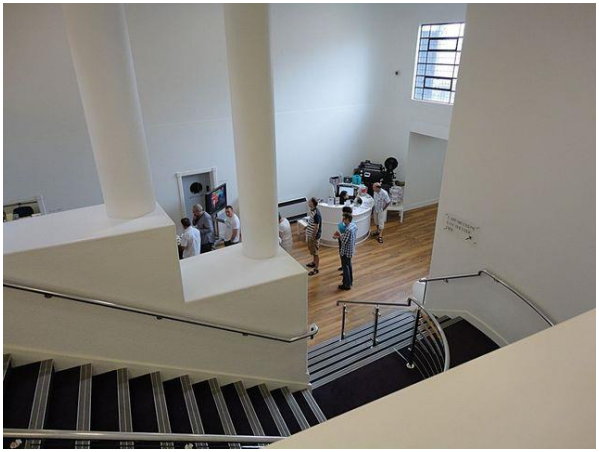
Fig.38
1 Salterns Way



Figs.39 & 40 'Lucky Star', Lagoon Road, Lilliput – former and current state

Figs.41 & 42 'Rialto', Marina Drive, Lilliput – former and current state





Figs.43-45
The Moderne Cinema, 711-15 Wimborne Road, Winton, Bournemouth - now the Bournemouth Community Church – the current exterior, the main staircase during the 1960s, and as the lobby appears now. Photos from the Church website and cinematreasures.org

Fig.46 Cedra Court, 4 Westby Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth

Fig.47 The Lion Works, 543 Wallisdown Road, Bournemouth

Figs.49-52
The Cumberland Hotel, East Overcliff Drive, Bournemouth

Fig.53 72-74 Banks Road, Sandbanks, Poole

Figs.54 & 55
2a Marina Drive, Lilliput, Poole – the 1950s/60s bungalow, and the 2010s Art Deco pastiche house

The southeast Dorset conurbation of Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch is unusually rich in buildings from the 1920s and 1930s, though most of them are relatively humble compared to the grand structures that usually find their way into books about Art Deco. They show how the idioms of the Art Deco style were translated into local settings (often where not that much money could be spent), and how people have carried on interpreting Art Deco over the decades since. Looking more closely at these sometimes disregarded buildings helps us pay more attention to both them and the built environment more generally.

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