

BELLE VUE



You are standing on the site of Belle Vue Botanical Gardens, one of Manchester's most cherished and remarkable visitor attractions from the 1830s to the 1980s. The gardens began as a tearoom in the early 19th century but, by 1836, were taken over by John Jennison, who extended them by 13 acres in 1843. The expanded site included a lake and natural history museum, with animals bought from Tinker's Gardens in Yorkshire. A maze, racecourse, bear pit, polar bear cage, paddock and large ballroom, accommodating up to 10,000 people, were constructed during the 1840s-50s. Further attractions included fireworks displays and brass bands.

Development continued in the 1860s-70s with the addition of a brewery, railway station and the Lake View hotel. New animal houses, an athletics ground, the 'Ocean Wave' and an open-air sea lion pool were built, and the gardens began generating their own electricity. During the late 19th century an ornate clock tower was built on an island in the lake, with tours on steamboats.

In 1873 the first elephant house was built, following the purchase of an Asian elephant named Maharajah from Wombwell's travelling menageries in Edinburgh. Although an attempt was made to transport Maharajah by rail, this was unsuccessful as he smashed the railway wagon. Instead, he arrived at Manchester by foot, after a 220-mile and ten-day walk, inspiring the David Barnaby story 'The Elephant Who Walked to Manchester'. Maharajah died in 1882, and his skeleton was then displayed in the Manchester Museum, being temporarily relocated to Manchester Piccadilly in 2021, allowing Maharajah to finally arrive at the station some 147 years later!

Belle Vue Botanical Gardens remained popular into the 20th century with new attractions being added, including a helter-skelter lighthouse, hall-of-mirrors, toboggan ride, roller skating and the King's Hall. Scenic and miniature railways were built in the 1920s, a floral clock in the 1930s, and a children's zoo and water chute in the 1950s. Two tigons (a cross between a male tiger and a female lion), Maude and Kliou, were kept in the zoo from 1936. Kliou died in 1942, and Maude in 1949, who was then taxidermied and can still be seen in Manchester Museum.

Belle Vue Stadium was built in the mid-1920s, for both greyhound and speedway racing. The stadium hosted Britain's first oval track greyhound race in 1926 and was home to the Belle Vue Aces speedway team from 1988 until 2015. Belle Vue Gardens finally closed in 1977, and Belle Vue Stadium in 2020.



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