

## Seaside in West Sussex - historical background

In 1750, Dr Richard Russell of Lewes wrote a "dissertation on the use of sea-water in the affections of the glands" in which he advocated bathing in and drinking sea-water to treat many illnesses. Visiting the seaside to "take the waters" became fashionable among the rich and those wishing to escape polluted London.

This fashion in sea-bathing played a large part in the development of seaside resorts in West Sussex, notably Bognor, Littlehampton and Worthing. From their early beginnings as farming and fishing settlements, and a harbour and port in the case of Littlehampton, all three towns were first developed as resorts in the eighteenth century. By the early 1800s they had built amenities such as baths, libraries, theatres or assembly rooms for the seasonal visitors.

Seaside towns in the county grew in popularity following visits by various members of the Royal family. The Prince of Wales became a regular visitor to Brighton from the early 1780s. Princess Amelia stayed in Worthing from August to December 1798. Princess Charlotte spent the summer in Bognor in 1808, popularising the resort developed by Sir Richard Hotham, and the future Queen Victoria visited Bognor several times as a child in the 1820s. Later Royal visitors to West Sussex included Princess Augusta to Worthing in 1829 and the Dowager Queen Adelaide to Worthing in 1849. King George V's visits to Bognor, where he spent some time convalescing from a serious illness in February to May 1929, led to the addition of "Regis" to the town's name. He was also visited there by his young grand-daughter Princess Elizabeth, later Queen Elizabeth II.

The Victorian period saw rapid growth in the size and population of these resorts, particularly when the coming of the railway to Worthing in 1845 and to Littlehampton and Bognor in the 1860s made it possible for visitors to arrive in greater numbers. The number of "fashionable" visitors decreased as large groups of people on works outings, or from organisations such as Temperance Unions, Trade Unions, and the Church Lads' brigade, took advantage of cheap day-trip excursion tickets; on one day in July 1900, there were an estimated 2,000 day-trippers from London to Worthing, including 1,500 members of the United Building Workers Union.

With increasing prosperity and leisure time from the early 1900s to 1960s, West Sussex resorts became ever more popular destinations for family summer holidays and day trips. Butlins amusement parks were built in Bognor (1930) and Littlehampton (1932), to be followed in 1960 by Butlins Holiday Camp in Bognor. Travel companies continued to promote day trips, by motor-coach as well as by train.

From the 1960s, the advent of cheaper plane travel and the growth of package holidays abroad led to a decline in the popularity of the English seaside holiday. West Sussex resorts, like others around the country, have experienced a reduction in the

numbers of visitors and have had to develop other sources of employment such as retirement homes, language schools, light industry and service industries.