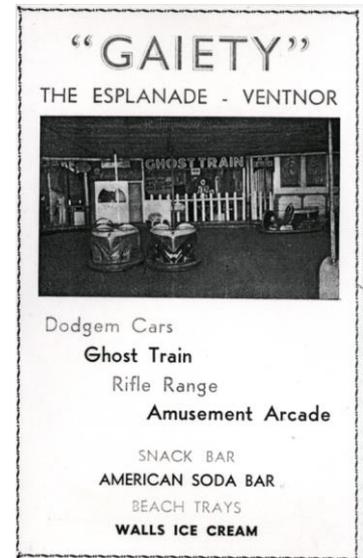




From Grand Pavilion to Gaiety 2 - Rifle Range and Dodgem Cars

Richard Studt took over the old Grand Pavilion building, renamed the Gaiety, in 1948. During the second world war he had assembled aircraft, but his youth was spent as a travelling showman in a fair belonging to his father Jacob, and used this experience to make the Gaiety a focal point on the Esplanade, running it with great success until he retired in 1976. The photograph and advert here are from the 1950s when attractions included dodgem cars, a ghost train, and a rifle range, as well as the snack bar and beach trays.



Richard Studt's son (also Richard) grew up in Ventnor when his father ran the business, and here recalls how the rifle range worked:

The rifle range was run by a somewhat serious gentleman of, I believe, Turkish extraction known by us as 'Monty'. I'm not sure if his name was really Monty but he did resemble Field Marshall Montgomery. I recall Monty's wife (known as 'Mrs Monty') occasionally looking after me as a little lad – she would take me to show me the lizards. They were innocent times. There was an old 78-playing juke box and I know there are many local ladies who will remember jiving around near the punch ball and the electric shock machine.

The rifle range was next to the juke box, and there were about ten guns which fired live .22 short bullets aimed at targets about 25 yards away. Behind the targets was a solid zinc block which was supposed to absorb the lead shot. This system occasionally failed and red hot lead would splash back and land on anyone unfortunate enough to be standing nearby – I have the scars to prove it! The targets were traditional 'bullseyes' printed on pieces of square card and fixed on a pulley system which also failed regularly so you had to go behind the counter to retrieve them. These were given to customers to keep as a record of their shooting skills. Rifles were loaded by Monty or my father. Six or so bullets were put in a tube which was then used to 'feed' into the rifles' firing systems. None of the above would be countenanced under modern Health and Safety regulations although I don't remember anyone being really hurt.

Another attraction was the Dodgems, remembered here by Mike Powell, who worked in the Gaiety as a teenager:

The Dodgems in 1952 were usually run by two teenagers. When the ride stopped and new customers got seated we collected as many fares as possible, restarted the ride and collected the remaining fares by jumping on the back of the car. With both feet splayed inside of the rubber bumper and holding on to the pole we were quite safe leaving a hand free to collect Mr Studt's sixpence. Looking back I still marvel at the trust and responsibility Mr Studt gave to us 15 year olds. I believe that he was an excellent judge of our capabilities and gave out jobs accordingly. Certainly no one came to any harm in the six weeks that I worked there in the summer of 1952, and, for a teenager, the money was wonderful.

After closing time the cafeteria would put out sandwiches and cakes that could not be kept until the next day. We would take our pick and retire to the dodgems for the 'Staff Ride'. Usually the public got 60% power - eight or so cars on the staff ride went like rockets on 100% power! We became very skilful drivers, weaving in and out with never a bump.

Generally the public were well behaved, all circulating in the same direction, bumping gently and having a good time. Occasionally a yobbo or pair of holiday yobbos would deliberately drive in the opposite direction creating as many head-on crashes as possible, often singling out attractive young ladies or children. One of the team would then take the spare car (we always kept one empty), get up behind the troublemakers and spin them mercilessly around the rink until they hit the side when they got out and left in sheer embarrassment.

Lesley Telford, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](#). Thanks to Richard Studt and Mike Powell for their memories of the 1950s, and Richard for the photograph of the Gaiety. Additional information and photograph from records held in our Collection.