

# ‘My experience booking bands for the Boathouse was very useful for me.’

In 1961 Bobby booked the Top Hat Ballroom in Portstewart for two fundraising dances, which proved so successful that they made over £100 profit. When the lease became available in October 1962, Bobby took it over, renaming it the Strand Ballroom.

The opening of the Strand Ballroom was reported as **‘an occasion which has created the greatest interest among the dancing public in this area for some time.’** (*Coleraine Chronicle*, 13 October 1962). Bobby was described as **‘one of the most popular personalities in the dancing business in the North-West among both the dancing public and the bands who supply the music.’** (*Coleraine Chronicle*, 13 October 1962).

“The Strand ballroom would have been one of the best ballrooms in the whole of Northern Ireland, it had a sprung maple floor.  
Barbara McIntyre”

**STRAND BALLROOM, PORTSTEWART**  
(FORMERLY TOP HAT) UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

**OPENING CARNIVAL NIGHT**  
*Lots of Prizes*

SATURDAY, 6th OCTOBER

PRESENTING **DONIE COLLINS** BAND OF THE YEAR

AND **THE BIG FOUR** IRELAND'S BEST SMALL GROUP

DANCING FROM 7-45 ADMISSION 6/-

Late transport to Portrush, Coleraine, Castlerock, Ballymoney after Dance. Also: a Bus will leave Market Square, Bushmills, for the Strand at 7-30pm, calling at all stops to Coleraine, returning after Dance. Return Fare 2/6.

Advertisement for the opening Carnival night of the Strand Ballroom.  
Courtesy *Coleraine Chronicle*, 6 October 1962.

“And it was great to be able to go and see them on your doorstep, I mean all you had to do was hop on a bus and you were down in Portstewart.”

Brian Henry

Two bands played on the opening night, The Big Four, previously booked by Bobby for the Boathouse, and the Donie Collins Showband. There was an **‘excellent turn-out, dancers coming from Portstewart, Coleraine, and surrounding towns, and from as far away as Ballymena, Derry and Belfast.’**

The team of directors of the Strand Ballroom included Bobby Platt as Managing Director; Sammy Barr, owner of the Flamingo Ballroom in Ballymena; George Connell, former leaseholder of the Top Hat, and boxing promoter; and Trevor Kane, music promoter based in Belfast.

The renovated Strand Ballroom had a wider bandstand **‘with the ends left open to bring the band more into the hall and to give dancers at all angles an opportunity to see the artistes taking part.’** There was also a café and snack bar.

Bobby also took over the lease to Limavady Agricultural Hall in September 1963, and **‘within a few short months the name became as widely known as the Arcadia, Strand and Boathouse.’** (*Coleraine Chronicle*, 28 December 1963).



The large crowd at the Strand Ballroom on opening night.  
Courtesy *Coleraine Chronicle*, 13 October 1962.



Two dancers doing the ‘Twist’ on opening night at the Strand Ballroom. Courtesy *Coleraine Chronicle*, 13 October 1962.



Bobby Platt and Sammy Barr with the Big Four, one of the showbands playing on opening night.  
Left to right: Doug Stewart, Pat McGuigan, Sammy Barr, Bobby Platt, Bill Davidson, Mike McGeady.  
Courtesy *Coleraine Chronicle*, 13 October 1962.

