Issue 8 Summer 2022

Pier Review

SOUTHEND PIER MUSEUM FOUNDATION TRUST LTD

REGISTERED CHARITY NO 802105

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Tim Watts

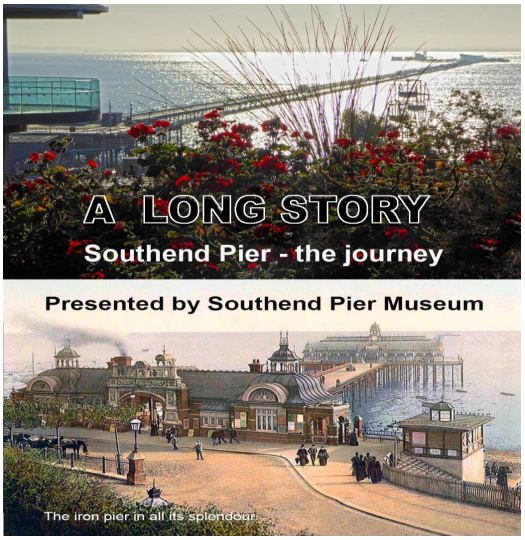
Hello again and welcome to the summer 2022 edition of the Pier Review.

Yet another busy few months as we extended our opening times to three days a week during the school summer holiday period. Following the August Bank Holiday we will revert back to weekend opening until we close at the end of October to regroup and renew the displays. Many thanks to our newest volunteers – Alan, Marcus and Eddie who have helped us stay open.

Following our exhibit changes last winter, we have replaced a number of our ceiling lights to improve the general lighting on the side of the museum away from the windows. We have lots of text to read in the museum and this certainly helps.

Kind and generous local residents are still approaching us to offer new items for our collection. As well as a number of pictures/photographs, we have a new model of the Golden Eagle and a 2m/6ft+ pennant from the Royal Daffodil, given away by a member of the crew as a souvenir on her last visit to Southend Pier.

It is a shame that the new Pier Trains are still having teething problems but we want them safe for visitors so better safe than sorry. The William Heygate is still doing a fantastic job.



THE PIER—ITS BEEN A LONG STORY

'A Long Story' is the history of Southend Pier from 1829 to the new millennium and the delivery of the 'Culture Centre', aka Royal Pavilion, and beyond. Youcan arrange purchase of the DVD (cost £12inc p+p) by either contacting sales@southendpiermuseum.co.uk or by writing to Southend Pier Museum Foundation Trust at Western Esplanade, Southend-on-Sea SS1 1EE . Cheques payable to Southend Pier Museum Foundation Trust

Preserving the past

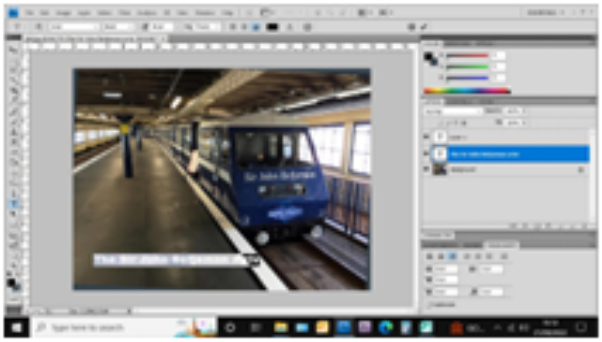
Chris Taylor looks at how the museum's DVDs start their life.

As visitors wander around the museum they probably give little thought about how that picture from 1890 arrived on the display panel or the cine film from 1909 ended up on the museum's DVD. There's a lot to it!

The museum has been given, and continues to acquire lots of items of interest in the form pf photographs and movies. For a start, lets look at the types of photos we get. They may be prints, colour slides or negatives, colour or black-and-white. They are usually from film but occasionally as a glass slide. They will be on 35 mm older ones are on 'Brownie Box' type film, 2 and a quarter inches wide and some older sizes.

But most of the photos given to the museum are as prints which have to be scanned using the sort of scanner which is part of a printer, or copied with a camera on a copy-stand when the size or level of damage necessitates it. Needless to say all of the pictures end up 'digitised' for the future.

The common factor is that they are usually in rather poor condition, old and tatty round the edges, scratched, faded, torn or with the colour faded to pink! Then the magic 'Photoshop' takes over! The screen looks typically like the one on the left.



Most people have heard of, but never used 'Photoshop'. It's a program which is designed to change photographs in clever ways. Apart from making fat people like me, look thinner and take the bags from under the eyes of film stars, it's wonderful when it comes to restoring old photos. It'll do the usual things like making things brighter and darker, bring out detail hiding in the shadows and let you fill in scratches and blotches. One of its clever talents is to restore old faded colour photos to look almost like new'

In the example opposite we were given a very old print of the old 'toastrack' on delivery. This shows the body of the car being transported from Loughborough to Chelmsford. The top picture is of the print as it arrived. The picture was restored to some extent and put onto a background showing the degree of damage in the original. Explanatory text was also added'. The bottom picture is of the restored picture with some of the missing parts replaced using a process called 'cloning' using elements of the picture from elsewhere to repair the damage.

It's cheating a bit, but serves a purpose sometimes.

Colour restoration is another of Photoshop's talents. Old colour pictures haven't fared too well over the years, the most common and serious parts of the detioration is their tendency to fade to pink.

Sometimes the fading goes so far that the colour has to be forgotten altogether and let the picture revert to being black and white, which is a more recoverable prospect.

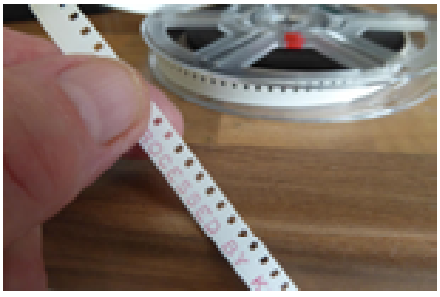
Here's a happy couple in the fifties enjoying a brisk walk down the pier. The value of these pictures is often in the way they reflect life styles. How many blokes these days do you see walking down the pier wearing a jacket and tie?

The picture has become flat and faded and the colour has almost gone. You can just make out that the train is green but everything else is pinkish grey.

The Photoshop controls take over and using various adjustments using what are in effect, colour filters and others which affect the brightness and contrast of the pictures in various ways and the colours are re-discovered. You cant make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but the overall effect is a lot better. The sky in this shot was a plain pink/grey and there was nothing to recover. I cheated with a crafty new talent of the latest Photoshop, 'Sky replacement'. It's a bit of a cheat so maybe it's not right for a museum display!

MOVIES AND VIDEOS

When it comes to movies the situation is a bit more complicated. You can pick up a photo and look at it, or hold it up to the light if it's a negative or slide. But when it's a movie on film there are 16 or 24 pictures in every second of it and you have to hold all that lot up to the light to see a tiny fraction of it. And even then the pictures don't move! So machinery gets involved which adds a lot of heartache. So, to see it, you need a projector, one that works and is of the right size. In the museum we have video displays created from 35mm, 16mm, 9.5mm, original 8mm and Super 8mm film! And some is sound, and some is silent. But to 'digitise' that lot needs a lot of kit in the form of dedicated scanners. Its mega-bucks stuff!



Most of the film-originated movies shown in the museum have been digitised in all sorts of ways over several years. Some were made by the East Anglian Film Archive with whom I have had many years of association. Other films, where the original quality isn't so good, and only short clips are needed they can be copied in a carefully set-up rig by filming the projected picture with a video camera.

Often when a 'home movie' is donated to us it is on 8mm film. In the early days it had bigger perforations and smaller pictures until Kodak made a version most people have heard of 'Super 8'. In the picture I'm holding the older 'Standard 8' variety. You can see how small the pictures are. One picture per hole in the film.

I also have a simple scanner for 8mm films which is handy for some shorter sequences, and the quality is quite good. Some 8mm clips in 'A long Story' were done this way. An example of 8mm film used for a museum film s was in the early days of Peggy Dowie's pier campaign when Paul Mercer made Only here for the pier! It was made in 1980 on Super 8 film and the still pictures taken from it are remarkably good, given the tiny pictures and age of the film. The next most common films we encounter are on 16mm film. In the museums repertoire are the 1935 LMS film 'Southend for Health and Pleasure' and most popular of all, Southend's wonderful publicity film the 1950s. 'The Best Place Under the Sun' and Sunshine on Sea'

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to be continued

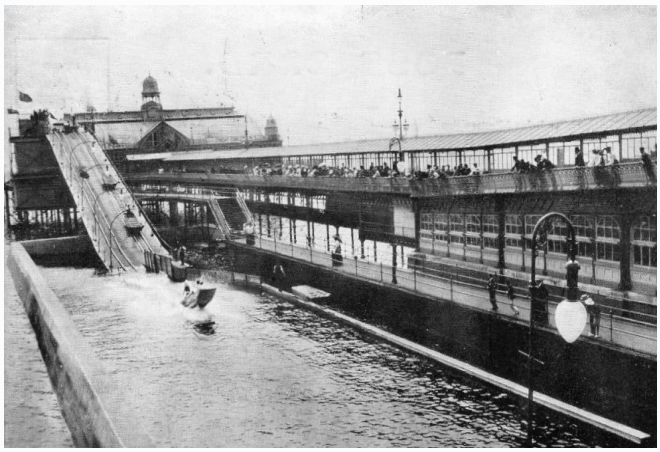
HOLDING BACK THE TIDE

From the Archive by Richard Brown

One of the things that not many people seem to realise about the seafront is the extent to which land has been reclaimed from the sea.

When the Iron Pier was built in 1890, nobody had ever tried interfering with the state of the tide, but subsequent years have seen the beach underneath the Pier turned into dry land by the simple process of building a new bit of the sea wall and enclosing part of the beach.

It all started in 1902, when the Pier was a little over ten years old and a Mr E Hills requested permission to build a water chute beside the Pier's promenade.



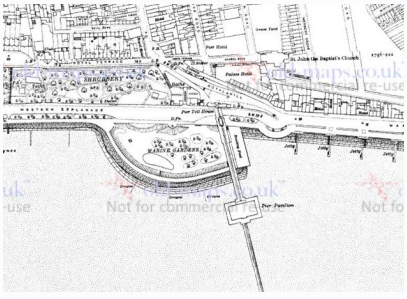
It was a huge piece of engineering, which must have cost a great deal of money. Two railway tracks carried boats with small wheels attached to them – the right hand one had a continuously moving chain going upwards which transported the boats up to the top, where the passengers were loaded in, and the boat launched down to the tidal pool below. It was almost (but not quite) the first 'thrill' that Southend offered, by a canny entrepreneur who realised that some people wanted more out of a day out than a paddle in the sea and a whiff of fresh air.

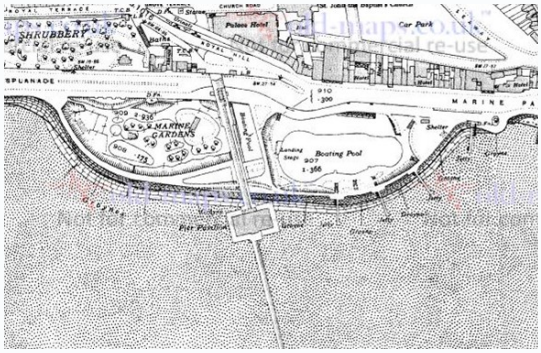
It was also the first time the beach had been built on – in order for the Water Chute to operate at all states of the tide, an economic necessity, some means of retaining water was needed. Over the years, a number of other tidal pools have been built, but this was the first, and it was also the first time that land had been reclaimed from the sea.

After only two years in operation, Mr Hills asked for permission to remove his Chute. To the west of London, in a small hamlet called Shepherd's Bush, a new exhibition ground which became known as the White City was planned, and Mr Hills saw more profit in taking his expensive piece of equipment to London rather than leaving it in Southend. Many years later, in 1921, as the White City itself was being redeveloped, the Water Chute came back to Southend and was installed at the Kursaal, where it continued in operation until the 1960s.

The process of creating more leisure space started again in about 1913, with the creation of the Sunk Gardens, using the beach to the west of the Pier.

This is not an easy picture to date, but in the distance can be seen something that looks like the Pier, but is probably the Westcliff open-air baths under construction. These were opened in May 1915, and many people will have happy memories of this enormous salt-water swimming pool, which finally closed in the 1970s and now has a casino built on top of the site.





The 1923 map (left) shows the extent of the land that was enclosed then, using Mr Hills' old tidal pool as its eastern boundary. Before WWII (right), the land to the east of the Pier had also been enclosed, allowing the creation of a large boating lake. This is now Adventure Island. The thrills won in the end.