Issue 10 Spring/Summer 2023

Pier Review

SOUTHEND PIER MUSEUM FOUNDATION TRUST LTD

REGISTERED CHARITY NO 802105

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Tim Watts

Welcome to the latest edition of Pier Review. I'm delighted to confirm that the museum is open again for the summer season, 11am-5pm on weekends and Bank Holidays until the end of October.

We had a very busy closed season and my sincere thanks to the stalwart group of volunteers who refurbished all our display boards over the winter. Stripping them down and repainting them took a lot more effort than expected! This range has been bolstered by some new display cabinets, including one obtained through a grant, that tells the early story of how the pier came to be created.

Changes you will see this season include new displays on the archaeological dig beneath the Thames to Oliver Cromwell's 17c warship, the London, and on Lt Commander Redfarn, a very interesting character from the pier's life as HMS Leigh during the Second World War. We have also expanded our penny arcade area with some new machines and there are more to come. In fact, pretty much every cabinet has at least one new item in it.

We will be busy in June with a dozen or so school visits where we can tell tales of the pier to the next generation. A couple of special interest groups are visiting us too.

Whilst our pool of volunteers is dedicated, it is also small and that is a risk to our operation. Thus if you are able to assist in any way, even for a few hours, your support would be most appreciated. No specific skills are necessary and there are a range of tasks, both customer facing and behind the scenes. Some can even be done from home. If you are able to help, please leave a message on our phone 01702 611214 or email chairman@southendpiermuseum.co.uk.

THE NATIONAL PIER SOCIETY'S PIER OF THE YEAR 2023

The Society's Chairman, Tim Wardley said:

'With visitor numbers tantalisingly close to breaking the half million a season mark, new attractions and state of the art pier trains, it is little surprise our members voted for Southend to receive the prestigious *Pier of the Year* award, made even more special as this year is nationally recognised as *Year of the Pier.* Southend Pier is a true survivor having withstood storms, fires, collisions and threats of closure to transform into the vital contributor to the resort's tourism and leisure economy it has become today. Southend Council continue to demonstrate their commitment to the success of the pier through record investment, and I am delighted this year the coveted accolade goes to the iconic longest pleasure pier in the world! Congratulations Southend!'

A LOT OF THANKYOUS

Those of you who have visited the Museum will know that we have a nice collection of vintage slot and other mechanical machines—sadly we couldn't bring them to use as we didn't have the keys. But thanks to the great team and generosity of Brights Locksmiths, led by Steve Wakefield who came down to take a look, they were able to fit new locks , cut keys which enabled Board member Garry Stickland to get into the innards and make necessary repairs. Brights took the lock details and removed some back panels from the coin operated machines, took them off site and fitted new locks, cut keys for other machines, supplied some large batteries for one machine and the components to enable Garry to assemble a battery charging unit. Supply of the components and labour was free of charge, for which we are mightily grateful and the time taken to support the museum. It is a good example of a local commercial business supporting voluntary organisations for the benefit of the community.

If any other local companies are in a position to sponsor or support the museum the Trustees would welcome their support?

Garry also drafted in some friends (volunteers for a few days) to put together a short length of railway track fitted on sleepers, jacked up the blue diesel train (Sir John Betjeman) and lowered the train onto the railway lines, (see pics below) he following week the same volunteers, plus one other, removed the worn out floor covering in the same train and are currently building a set of steps to allow access to the train. This is an example of people giving up their time to support the museum and our thanks go to Mark Bailey, Tony Lewis and Peter Chapman for their help. (photos attached). Our thanks to all the other volunteers who have helped get the museum back on track over recent years.

THE CITY THAT WALKS ON WATER (CTWOW)

Tuesday,19th – Saturday 23rd September 2023
Tickets are available for both AM and PM shows!
If you would like to know more, or would like to take part in the project please see the CTWOW website WWW.CTWOW.ORG.UK
The City that Walks on Water Project (CTWOW) is a community led creative exploration of Southend-on-Sea's historical legacy. It aims to create a dramatic and inclusive theatrical blueprint that informs and engages the rich and diverse heritage that has made a small fishing village into a thriving city.
Listen to the podcast to find out all about it
Podcast | City That Walks On W (ctwow.org.uk)

TELL US YOUR STORIES

If you are a devotee of our wonderful Pier—why not send us your memories of visits in the past and what it means to you. Send them to carole.mulroney@btinternet.com.

EARLY YEARS OF THE PIER RAILWAY

There had been a railway of sorts on the old wooden Pier – a horse tram, which had been originally intended for cargo, but proved to be much more profitable when carrying humans, and thus carriages had been designed for them. However, the continual wearing of the wooden planking by horses' hooves was a large factor in deciding that Southend needed something much more robust – an Iron Pier. The Iron Pier was built next to the old wooden Pier, and was opened in 1890.

From the beginning the new Pier railway was planned, but at a time when almost all railways were steam hauled, an electric railway was almost unheard of. Even the concept of electricity itself was a new one, and the idea of a National Grid, delivering electric power to every house, was far off in the future. Nevertheless, six years before, an electric railway had been built along the seafront at Brighton by Magnus Volk - a railway that runs to this day, and which still owns an old 'toastrack' car from the early years of Southend's Pier railway. The railway was built by Crompton's of Chelmsford, one of the earliest electrical engineers in the world, and the first to mass-produce electric light bulbs.

Inaugural run of the Toastrack train in August, 189

The picture shows the scene on the 2nd August 1890 at the inaugural run, which should have happened in the morning, but the members of the Southend Local Board did not arrive until the afternoon, by which time a lot of celebratory champagne had been drunk. The man sitting at the front and holding the brake wheel is probably Colonel Rookes Crompton himself, founder of the company that bore his name, and, for sheer invention, the nearest British equivalent to the American Thomas Edison.

The single car ran for the rest of that day up and down the mile of track that had been laid, powered by a coal-powered generator that produced 200 volts, which was transmitted to the car by a thin copper strip fitted off-centre between the rails.

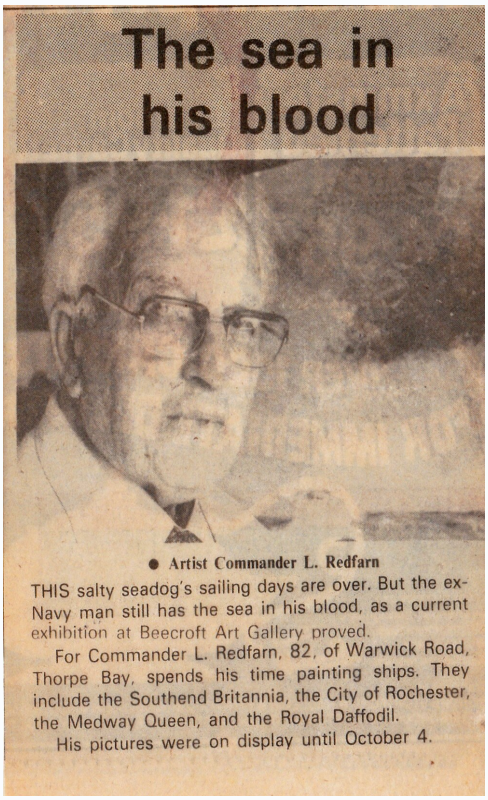
The railway was an immediate success. Three weeks later, on August Bank Holiday 1890, at the official opening of the Iron Pier, 3000 people were carried on the single car, which ran all day. Two years later, five more cars were ordered, thus allowing two trains of three cars each to run, and in 1898 a passing loop was added halfway along the Pier, which doubled the frequency of the trains.
At its peak, the Pier Railway consisted of four trains of seven cars each, which could all run simultaneously, especially after a second track was laid in 1930.

The scene in about 1895, the first time a train of three carriages was run. As compared to the first car, the later ones had a roof for the driver.

The original station for the railway was underneath the Pier Pavilion, shown in the background. As the trains became longer, the station needed to be extended, and in 1930 it was moved so that it was placed underneath the promenade, between the Pier Pavilion and the road. At the same time, workshops under the station were created for maintenance purposes, and these later became the Pier Museum.

Richard Brown

LEONARD DOUGLAS REDFARN



The sea in his blood

● Artist Commander L. Redfarn

THIS salty seadog's sailing days are over. But the ex-Navy man still has the sea in his blood, as a current exhibition at Beecroft Art Gallery proved.

For Commander L. Redfarn, 82, of Warwick Road, Thorpe Bay, spends his time painting ships. They include the Southend Britannia, the City of Rochester, the Medway Queen, and the Royal Daffodil.

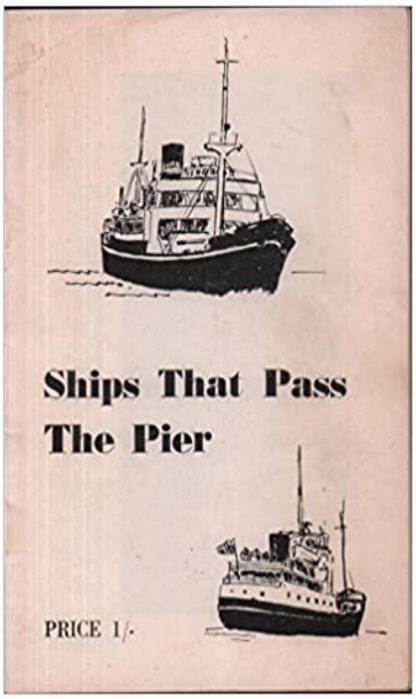
His pictures were on display until October 4.

Leonard Douglas Redfarn was born in 1901 in Lewisham and joined the Merchant Navy at the age of 15 and became a master mariner.

During WWII he joined the Royal Naval Reserve, ranked as a Lieutenant Commander, and served on Southend Pier then known as HMS Leigh controlling the Corporation Loading Pier.

He was later based in Liverpool and was involved in the American invasion of North Africa, but at War's end returned to Southend Pier in his senior role controlling the loading pier.

He lived in Thorpe Bay until his death in 1992 and his ashes were scattered at sea at the Pier.



Ships That Pass The Pier

PRICE 1/-

As can be seen from the press cutting (1983) he was also an accomplished artist of maritime themes. He was also an author of a pamphlet entitled 'Ships that Pass Southend Pier' which although listed on Amazon is unavailable. Does anyone have a copy?

"FLOATING MUSEUM " SET TO VISIT THE PIER

As it celebrates the National Piers Society "Year of the Pier", Southend will welcome the Spanish tall ship El Galleon from 24 to 29 May, and will be offering an "open ship" from 11am to 7pm. The replica ship's 6 decks offer fascinating features, exhibits, and displays, with an incredible 3,400 sq ft of deck space open to visitors. Adults £10 children 5-12 £5. This is additional to the price of admission to the Pier. Book online at the Pier website.