Issue 11
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, hot on the heels of the last one. We are busy in the summer season, keeping the museum open and welcoming visitors. We are hopeful that the Herd in the City display of painted elephants will attract more people (the reception area has 5 mini elephants and there is a full size one, “Sir David”, on the top deck).

We continue to gratefully receive donations of items relating to the pier and the seaside experience.

In the last few weeks, we have welcomed nearly 600 school children via organised trips. These visits are exhausting to host but very rewarding and we look forward to receiving some of them back with their parents. The old penny slot machines remain a firm favourite!

The business of operating a charitable trust continues and we welcome all members to the upcoming Annual General Meeting. Refreshments will be provided.

Please remember, volunteers are always welcomed. If you are able to help us in any way, please leave a message on our phone 01702 611214 or email chairman@southendpiermuseum.co.uk.

The AGM will be held in the museum itself at 2pm on Thursday 14 September. The entrance is in the far corner of the Pier Railway entrance foyer.

Agenda.

Chairman's Report.

Treasurer’s Report and approval of accounts.

Election of Directors and Officers.

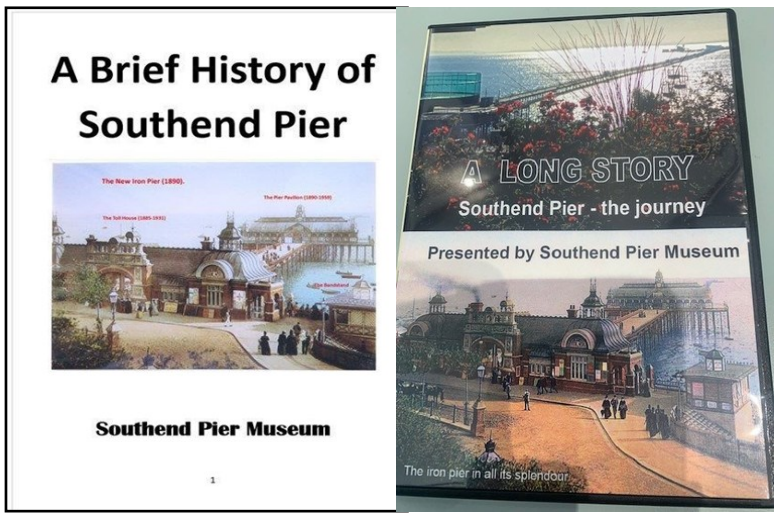
Questions, and Future plans.

<<<DON’T MISS IT!

PIER OF THE YEAR 2023.

The Mayor of Southend, Councillor Stephen Habermel, and Councillor Derek Jarvis receiving the Pier of the Year award from the Chairman of the National Piers Society, Tim Wardley.

OUR LATEST PUBLICATIONS



A Brief History of Southend Pier. An illustrated overview of the Pier’s history from 1796 until the present day. Price £3.

A Long Story. The Pier’s history in pictures and video. The DVD costs £10.

The War Story of Southend Pier. A reprint of AP Herbert’s classic book about Southend Pier in World War 2, first published in 1945. Price £5.

We also have a wide range of reproduction posters for sale in A4, A3 and larger sizes.

Email sales@southendpiermuseum.co.uk, or write to:
Southend Pier Museum, Western Esplanade, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1EE.
Cheques payable to Southend Pier Museum Foundation Trust.
Please add £1 for postage. Payment by bank transfer—please ask for details.

A DARLING OF A FIND

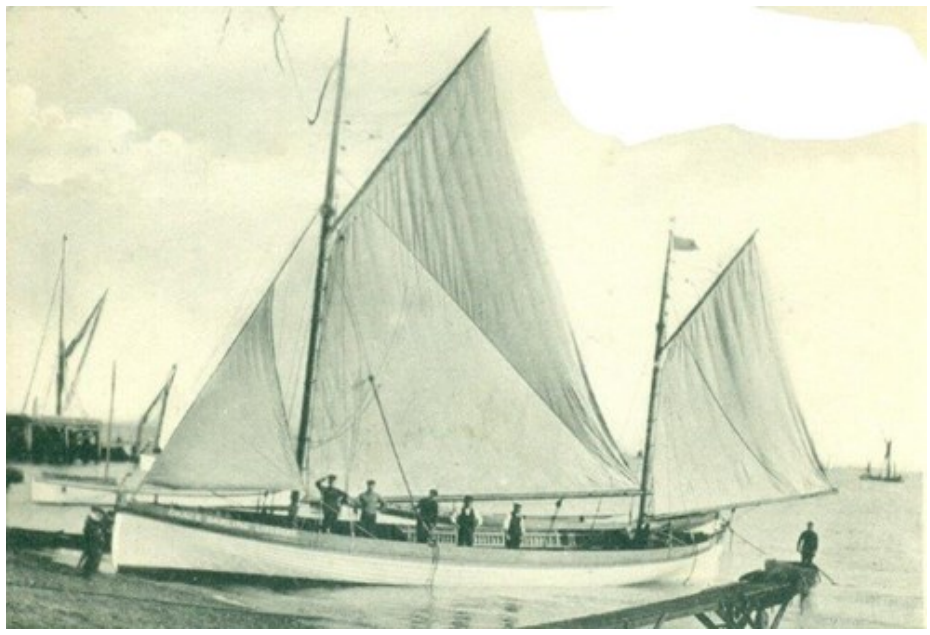
We all need to do a garden tidy up from time to time, and former secretary of the Leigh Society, Margaret Buckey, is no different. But it's amazing what you find. Margaret's late husband, David, was a bit of a collector of things related to the sea, as a sailor himself, and of pieces of wood that might come in handy.

Whilst having a garden tidy up recently Margaret came across a piece of wood which revealed a bit of local history. This innocent looking piece contained a secret, revealed when turned over. It bears the name Grace Darling, and obviously came from a boat. Margaret got in touch with Peter Wexham who was able to provide some background. The Grace Darling was an old ship's lifeboat and was used for sailing trips from Southend beach between the Pier and the loading jetty. Below are three postcards of her on Southend beach.

Grace Darling was the daughter of the keeper of the Langstone light, a lighthouse built on the Farne Islands off the coast of Northumberland. On the 7th September 1838, the paddle steamer 'Forfarshire', en route from Hull to Dundee with 62 passengers and crew, experienced complete engine failure in a gale and was blown onto the rocks surrounding the islands. Grace and her father watched the tragedy unfold, and alerted the Sunderland lifeboat, many miles to the south. However, the gale was too strong for the lifeboat, so Grace persuaded her father to set out in their 21 ft rowing boat (designed for three strong men to row) to rescue whatever survivors they could find. Grace managed to control the boat on her own in the storm while her father organised the nine survivors and managed to get them onto the boat and back to safety. Grace became a national celebrity— she was showered with gifts, money and even proposals of marriage. Wordsworth wrote a poem about her, and many contemporary pictures depict Grace and her brave journey.

This picture bears a postmark of 29 April 1914.

Well done Margaret, and thank you from the Pier Museum Trust for donating the piece to its collection.



A later picture of the Grace Darling in full sailing rig.

This picture bears a stamp on the back—BUY NATIONAL WAR BONDS NOW. It is difficult to see the name board but it is there. War bonds were first sold in 1917 as a means of financing the First World War, but were not repaid until 2015.

EL GALEON ANDALUCIA.

A picture paints a thousand words as crowds flock to the Pier for a taste of the High Seas.

(Picture— thanks to Eddie Hardiman.)

El Galeon Andalucia visited the end of Southend Pier from May 23rd to June 4th, and crowds of a size not seen on the Pier for many years descended on the town to see her. Here, the owners of El Galeon describe the ship…..

This galleon is a faithful historical replica of the Spanish galleons that sailed the Atlantic, navigated the Caribbean, the American coasts and covered the immense Pacific route from the 16th to the 18th century. An imposing ship of 55 meters in length, six decks, made of iroko and pine wood, and almost a thousand square meters of sail area in its seven sails, built with careful historical rigor.

During her stay in Southend-on-Sea, the public will be able to get on board, tour her five decks and learn about her details, how she sails, what life was like on board and the history of these ships. Part of the experience is boarding a ship that today sails the seas of the world with a young crew, who have amazing experiences on their long voyages. A true floating museum of the Spanish maritime culture that has already sailed more than 55,000 nautical miles across oceans and seas around the world, visiting ports on four continents, such as Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila, New York or Quebec, spreading its history.

PLEASE SEND IN YOUR PIER MEMORIES AND PICS FOR FUTURE EDITIONS OF THE PIER REVIEW.

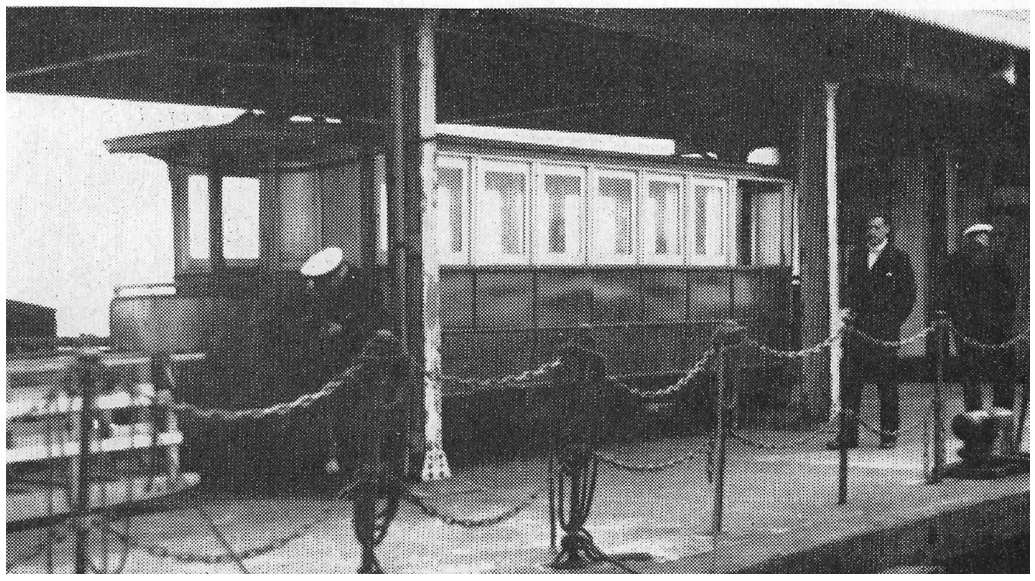
Early Years of the Pier Railway.

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 human cargo, 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 idea of electricity itself was a new one, and 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. 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 without incident. 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.



Later toastracks had an enclosed cab for the driver. The original station for the railway was underneath the Pier Pavilion, shown in the background of the 1890 picture. The last picture shows the last toastrack to survive on the Pier, used as an anglers' shelter until it was scrapped in 1962.

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.

Remember the Pier Museum is an added bonus at the Pier and tickets can be purchased with your Pier walk or train ticket.