Issue 12 Winter 2024

Pier Review

SOUTHEND PIER MUSEUM FOUNDATION TRUST LTD

REGISTERED CHARITY NO 802105

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Tim Watts

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Happy New Year to all! Whilst we had hoped to get this newsletter out to you before Christmas, the short delay does mean I am able to report on our winter opening trial. As per usual, we closed to visitors at the end of October after a successful season. Our AGM was held and thank you to the members who joined us at the event. I hope you found it interesting.

Whilst visitor numbers were steady and income from admissions and sales increased last year, this was more than offset by the high energy bills to keep the museum at an acceptable temperature and humidity. I'm sure many of you recognise the financial challenge of keeping your own homes warm at this difficult time! Anyway, back to the trial.

We have been trying to work even closer with the council and in an effort to further demonstrate the potential shared benefits, we decided to open again on weekends during the months leading up to Christmas. We additionally opened on Boxing Day and New Year's Day, two of the busiest days on the pier. In addition, we decided to experiment with offering free entry, simply asking for donations rather than an admission charge. In terms of visitor numbers this has (perhaps unsurprisingly) proved a great success with daily attendance three times higher than during the summer. Over just Boxing Day and New Year's Day, over 400 people visited the museum! However, the financial benefits did not keep pace with the increased visitor numbers, we were still taking about the same amount of money as when we charged for entry. There are clearly lessons to be learnt. Its also clear that we add to the experience for those visiting the pier, even if that's as simple as something to amuse them whilst waiting for the train or sheltering from the weather!

We are now taking stock, doing repairs, refreshing exhibits, etc in preparation for our summer opening on 29th March.

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.

FROM THE ARCHIVES 1963

Following on from last edition's item about the 'Grace Darling' lifeboat, here's another Grace Darling, one of the many boats that used to operate around high tide, using the small portable jetties that were once a prominent feature of the beach around the Pier.

Here's about 30 bobs worth of fare-paying passengers ready to depart for a trip around the end of the Pier, and an anxious boat-owner wondering if he can wait any longer for anyone else to roll up, before he loses the tide, and his passengers, at the end of their trip, have to get out and walk across the mud to get home.

Here's another 1963 view of the beach east of the Pier.

The wooden Pier in the foreground is probably the Prince of Wales Slipway, built in 1953 for the return of the Royal Yacht Britannia from its maiden voyage. The entire Council plus Aldermen and the Mayor in full regalia, boarded a boat from the jetty so that they could be out in the middle of the river to welcome the Britannia, with the new Queen and Prince Philip on board, as it passed by. It is the only jetty that still survives on Southend seafront.

In the background of the picture can be seen the old Gasworks, still then producing Coal Gas instead of the North Sea Gas that was introduced in the 1970s. The coal was delivered to the Gasworks Pier, out of sight to the right, and transported across the road on the high-level bridge that can be clearly seen in the background.

Almost all traces of the Gasworks Pier and the bridge have since disappeared, apart from the two large brick pillars opposite the main door of the Premier Inn which are all that remain of the bridge. Just west of these, two blue gates opposite the Gasworks car park, mark the original entrance to the old Corporation Jetty.

A bit further east, the terrace of cottages next to the Premier Inn used to be a lot longer. However, three cottages in the middle of the terrace were demolished so that Victoria Road could be extended to the seafront. The old Gasworks site now consists of a large car park, a Premier Inn, and a lot of new development on the west side of Victoria Road.

Richard Brown

FOSMS

We are sad to learn that the Friends of Southend Museum (FOSMS) has closed but very grateful to them for a donation of £550 from their remaining funds. This will help enormously in the work we are doing over the winter months.

We regret to announce that one of our longest serving former trustees, Barbara Armitage, passed away in November. Barbara gave over 70 years of public service to the country and we were honoured to have her on the trustee board until her retirement through ill health a few years ago. She was instrumental in the opening of the museum in 1989, when her husband John and herself were Mayor and Mayoress of the Southend. The role provided a variety of opportunities including the chance to take a helicopter ride from the end of the pier, something only a few have experienced. Barbara's voice on the trustee board was always a very considered one and we miss her years of experience.

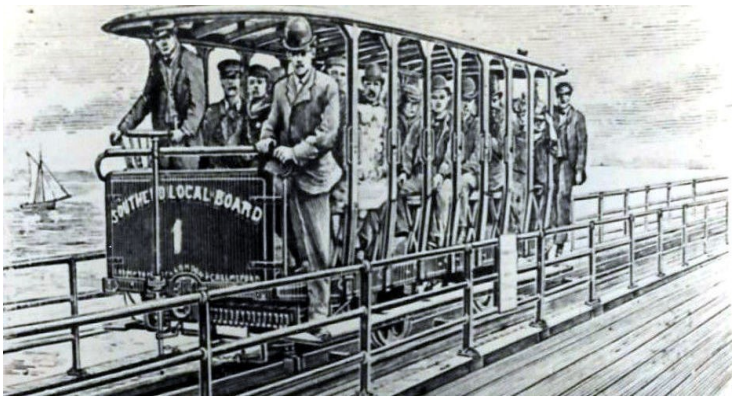
NEW WALMINGTON PIER

We know our members have a special love for and memories of Southend Pier but we are sure they also love piers in general, so sometimes its nice to look at other piers, albeit in miniature, especially when there is a connection to Southend.

Please take a look at Home | New Walmington Pier and you will find a fascinating story. If you scroll down you can see the evolution of our own pier trains.

Set in Edwardian times the layout depicts a small pier tramway with a working carousel at the Pier Head. A Southend Pier 1890 "Toastrack" Car provides the passenger service.

Southend Local Board Crompton Electric Ry 9 is this Shapeways/Westgate Models Southend Pier Toastrack Car finished exactly as the preserved car in Chelmsford Museum.
The actual Southend 9 now Volks Electric Railway 9S returned to Brighton in August 2023.



Future Exhibitions for 2024

(all to be confirmed so watch the New WalmingtonPier website)

21 July: Aldridge Transport Museum

7 September: Sheringham High School

19 October: Forest Hill Boys School,

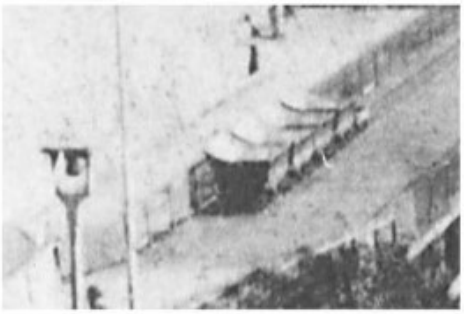
2/3 November: East Coast College, Lowestoft

Information from Dave Carson at New Walmington Pier with grateful thanks

THE HORSE DRAWN TRAM

From the very earliest years of the wooden Pier, there was a demand to move goods down the Pier. Despite the huge list of charges imposed on anything that could possibly be taken down the Pier (4d for a barrel of herring, a guinea for a dead body), transport was extra. You didn't get anything for nothing in those days, especially considering the enormous amount of borrowed money that had been spent on building the Pier.

Wooden carts would probably have been used first, possibly drawn by horses or simply pushed along, and even sail power was said to have been used when the wind was right. It wasn't long before rails were suggested, but the cost of iron rails like the railways was prohibitive, so wooden rails (as had been used in mines for hundreds of years) were laid instead. The wheels of the carts obviously needed changing from flat to bevelled ones.



This a detail from an early photograph showing a row of trucks and railway tracks, but no signs of horses or any means of connecting a horse to the trucks.

When Southend Corporation bought the Pier in 1875, iron rails were laid, and the tourist potential was served by putting on proper passenger carriages, and designing them to be horse-drawn. In the second picture the crew appear to be lining up for the publicity picture for the start of the new service. Possibly the date on the postcard is a few years too early.

The horse tram was too successful for its own good. The constant wear of the horses' hooves began to splinter the decking, and holes began to appear. One councillor suggested the use of elephants instead, but fortunately he was ignored. However, for the last few years of the existence of the wooden Pier, the damage was so bad that the Horse Tram was suspended, severely affecting the income of the Pier. If you wanted transport down the Pier, you had to wait for the Iron Pier and its brand new electric railway, opened in 1890.

WHY NOT VOLUNTEER

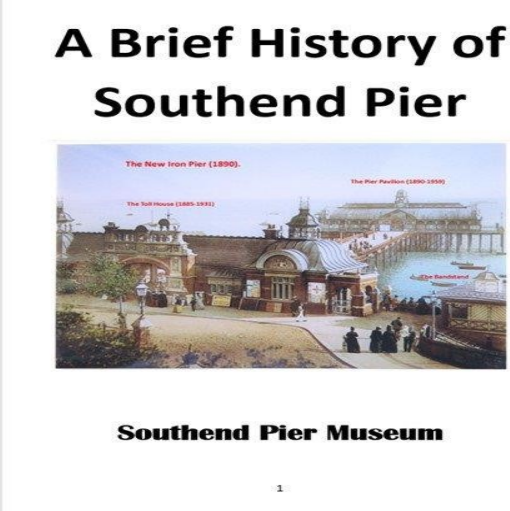
As the Pier heads into the summer months (hurry please) we are looking forward to an even better year than 2023. It was a good year and we got a lot of work done in the museum but of course it never ends.

But we do need more stewards to man the museum as well. With largish groups coming in and quite a space to cover ideally we want 3 people on each shift so we are spreading ourselves very thin.

Working as a steward is very enjoyable, you meet a diverse range of people from the true train enthusiasts to those just interested in the local history and the history of the Pier . If you have a few regular hours to spare (we will be opening weekends from Good Friday) please get in touch with us at chairman@southendpiermuseum.co.uk or 01702 611214 for a chat.

PUBLICATION

Ever wanted a potted history of Southend Pier—well this little book will fit the bill.
Available in the museum (£3) and by post p & p added apply to sales@southendpiermuseum.co.uk or by writing to Southend Pier Museum Foundation Trust at Western Esplanade, SoS SS1



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