Issue 13 Spring 2024

# Pier Review

SOUTHEND PIER MUSEUM
FOUNDATION TRUST LTD
REGISTERED CHARITY NO 802105

## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

A welcome to members, old and new, to the spring edition of the Southend Pier Museum newsletter.

The museum opened for the summer season on Friday 29 March as planned. Changes for this year include an up-dated timeline, an expanded disasters display and a new "interactive" experience that allows young drivers to pre-tend they are driving the diesel train down the pier at high speed! Our ever-popular old penny slot machines are still there too and more are being worked on.

We decided to continue the free entry trial, with pleas for donations, over the summer season but are closely monitoring it to ensure the financial viability of the approach over the longer term. Thankfully the monthly gas bills have started to reduce with the warmer weather.

Visitor numbers have remained high and we welcomed over 900 people over the long Easter weekend. Numbers for the Early May bank holiday were comparable, with over 300 visitors on Bank Holiday Monday alone. My sincere thanks to the volunteers who were rushed off their feet! The massively increased visitor numbers since we stopped charging admission clearly suggests a way ahead, even if some are just amusing themselves whilst waiting for the train. We will continue to press the Council to recognise the added value we provide to the pier's "visitor offering".

We are now heading into school trips season and look forward to welcoming hundreds of young enthusiastic pier visitors. With increased visitor numbers, volunteers are needed more than ever. If you are able to help us in any way (whether that's an odd shift front of house or helping behind the scenes) please leave a message on our phone 01702 611214 or email me on chairman@southendpiermuseum.co.uk.

## NEW FOR 2024

This year a new timber wall has been constructed in the museum to support a 65 inch TV screen to facilitate the new simulated train ride. Visitors can now experience this amazing adventure seated in the driver's cab in the 1986 train.

The Sir John Betjeman a 1986 blue diesel train (Alpha) has been refurbished by a group of volunteers over a number of months, and work undertaken includes building a new section of railway line for the train to rest on, repairing and screeding the train floor, building access staircases to the drivers cab and car using recycled pier deck boards, installing new rubber flooring, removal of paint and polishing seat supports, painting seat frames in the drivers cab, touching in damaged external car paintwork and polishing the car and overhauling interior lights. Future work planned for later in the year will include refurbishment of the train dashboard

## From the Archives, 1846.

The handsome affluent chap with the winning smile is **Sir Samuel Morton Peto**, an unsung hero in the history of Southend and its Pier, which he leased for a number of years. As an example of the boom-and-bust Victorian economy, Peto has few equals. For some years, he was the largest employer of labour on earth – his civil engineering company built Nelson's Column, the Houses of Parliament, and most of the sewers of London, and then he turned to building railways.

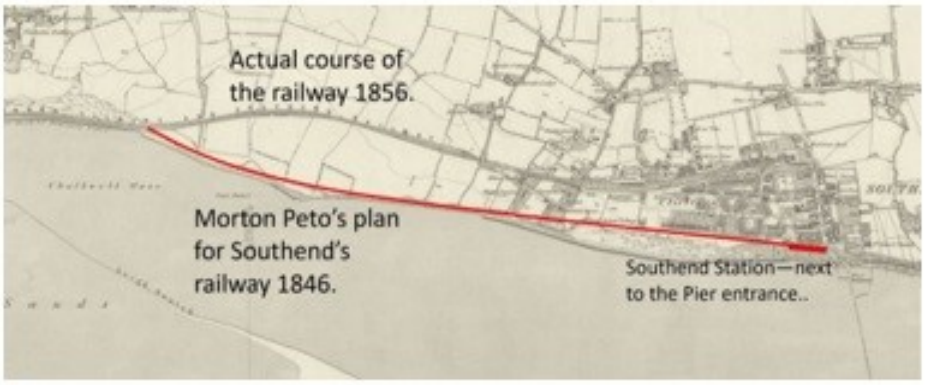
It took 17 years, from 1829 to 1846, for the two ends of Southend Pier to be finally joined together, and arriving at Southend by boat became a pleasurable experience, rather than one that involved a muddy walk across a gravel path where the as-yet-unfinished Pier should have been. By 1846, construction costs had amounted to about £40,000, a lot of which was still owed to Government and various banks, so there was very little rejoicing in Southend at the news that the Pier was finally complete. In 1846, it was up for sale.

The winning bidder, probably the only bidder, was David Waddington, chairman of the Eastern Counties Railway, then building the main line to Colchester and Norwich. He paid £12,000 for Southend Pier, not much more than the scrap value of the wood used to build it. Waddington was not interested in the Pier, but his pal Peto was, and Waddington leased it to him.

### 'The Railway Mania'. A newspaper cartoon of 1846.

1846 was also the year in which the 'railway mania' came to its peak, a time when everyone was building railways from everywhere to everywhere else. That year, no fewer than 254 separate railway schemes had been approved by Parliament (of which only a few were actually built) and among the schemes that didn't make it were four different routes for the London Tilbury and Southend Railway proposed by Peto. However by 1851 the first LT&SR act was passed, enabling him to start building, and in 1856 the railway arrived in Southend, bringing with it mass tourism for the first time.

## Peto's Grand Plan.




Peto had plans for the railway to Southend. He would create the centre of the up-and-coming seaside resort with his terminus next to the Pier Entrance. To get there, he had to carve a large hole through the middle of Leigh on Sea. This was not entirely his fault – he had only planned a single track railway through the village, but a Board of Trade Inspector considered that a single track all the way from Tilbury to Southend was too dangerous, and required Peto to double the track, thus creating chaos in Leigh in 1854. From then on, there was an empty stretch of beach all the way to the entrance to the Pier, and the centre of the new town that Peto was going to create. If that plan had succeeded, Southend would today be a very different place but, fortunately, some of the aristocratic residents of Southend banded together to pass a local by-law which required that the sound of a steam whistle could not be heard at the Pier. So the railway turned inland at what is now Chalkwell station, and the terminus was built halfway up the High Street instead.

## Southend terminus, now Southend Central, in 1856

Peto had, by now, discovered that there was very little money in building railways, so his real aim was the construction of the Clifftown estate, completed in 1861, south of the railway. He was, by now, fabulously wealthy and had an enormous country house, Somerleyton Hall, set in 5000 acres of Suffolk. But it was not to last – one financial speculation too many resulted in his bankruptcy in 1866 and he fled to Budapest. At the same time, David Waddington had also mysteriously disappeared following a financial scandal at the Eastern Counties Railway, and the ownership of the Pier became very uncertain, a problem that remained until the Southend Local Board bought it in 1875 for £10,000.

## CHANGES TO SUBSCRIPTION ARRANGEMENTS

After long consideration, the Board have decided to make some amendments to the rather haphazard scheme of membership payments.

Subscriptions were renewed at or before the AGM, which was typically held sometime in May, but has somewhat slipped in recent years. It also assumed that our members were actually going to come to the AGM and pay their subs then. Clearly with a membership which stretches far beyond Southend this is impractical and few are actually able to make the journey.

The Board have therefore decided that the membership period should coincide with the Museum's financial year, ie 1 April to 31 March. Thus all membership subscriptions would become payable as from 1 April every year.

New members signing up during the (normal) close season, from November onwards, would be offered membership that includes the next financial year. So, a membership that starts in December 2023 would expire on 31 March 2025.

If you have already paid your membership for 2024 it will now expire on 31 March 2025.

## WHY NOT VOLUNTEER

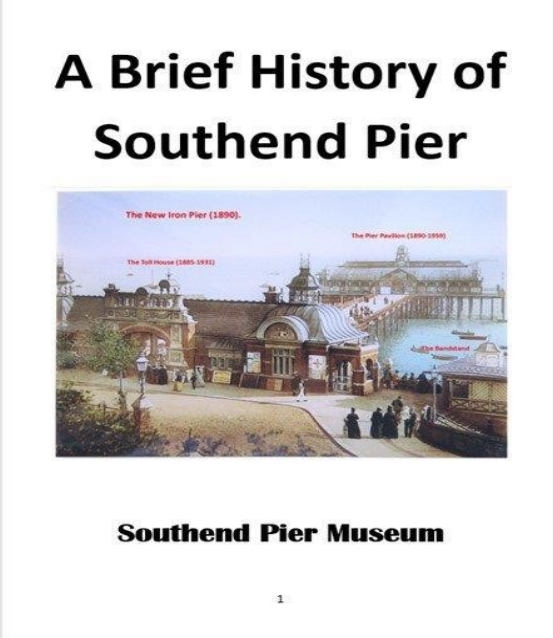
As the Pier heads into the summer months (hurry please) we are looking forward to an even better year than 2023. It was a good year and we got a lot of work done in the museum but of course it never ends.

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 1EE. Cheques payable to Southend Pier Museum Foundation Trust

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