



# Pier Review

**SOUTHEND PIER MUSEUM FOUNDATION TRUST LTD**

REGISTERED CHARITY NO 802105



## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Tim Watts

Welcome to a bumper edition of the Pier Review!

We have been rushed off our feet in the museum following the decision to extend the free entry trial for this year's summer season. Visitor numbers have been very high with approaching 300 people coming in on several days so far this year.

We are benefitting from events being held on the pier and are bracing ourselves for the influx of visitors when the Galleon Andalusia and the Medway Queen pay their visits to the pier head at the end of August and September respectively.

We are currently refurbishing a new machine for our ever popular games area but it runs on old 3d coins "thruppeny bits". Do any members have any they would be prepared to donate? We are also short of 2 shilling/florin/old 10p coins for the What the Butler Saw machines. Anyway, enough from me, I hope you enjoy reading the newsletter.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**The AGM will be held in the museum  
at 10.30am on Monday, 9 September 2024**

**The entrance is in the far corner of the Pier Railway entrance foyer.**

### Agenda

- 1. Minutes of Last Year's AGM**
- 2. Chairman's Report.**
- 2. Treasurer's Report and approval of accounts.**
- 3. Election of Directors and Officers.**
- 4. Questions, and Future plans.**

## Chairman's Annual Report

Overall, I can report a very successful year with increased visitor numbers and the Trust being in profit, not something we have been used to in the past. The financial success has been achieved despite some extremely high gas bills. The launch of our free entry trial and extended opening up to Christmas last autumn, after years of paid admissions, was a risk, but one that seems to be paying off. We have extended that free entry trial for the 2024 summer season. Visitor numbers are a multiple of what they were before and, whilst the income per visitor is smaller than it was, the additional numbers more than offset this.

We were delighted to receive a grant to help us build and print an education pack to support our popular school visits programme. Over 500 schoolchildren visited last year - exhausting, but hopefully we are helping to light a spark of interest in history within them.

We welcomed Steve Brown as a co-opted trustee following his help as a volunteer. Steve brings a new perspective on things and is leading on our volunteer programme. We also welcome Cllr Matt Dent as the appointed council director. Derek Jarvis, who previously held the position, will be staying on the board in a personal capacity.

I'm delighted to advise that our collaboration with the Pier team is going strong. On days when the pier is extremely popular and queues are building up, we are happy for them to be directed into the museum - more visitors for us and fewer frustrated queuers for them! We have bigger plans for collaboration in mind for the coming year.

So a healthy situation an one we are looking to build upon.

Tim Watts, Chairman

### Treasurer's Report, 2023-2024.

Last year, I noted that there had been quite a lot of change financially during the year, thinking that things might settle down this year. Far from it. Following a board decision to remain open after the usual closing date of the end of October and to experimentally cancel admission charges and rely on donations, our finances have improved. Following that extended opening, which included Boxing Day and New Year's Day, the board decided to continue the experiment during the 2024 season, so the Pier Museum now relies on sales income and donations in lieu of admission charges. The full impact of this decision will not, however, be seen until next year.

The big news, therefore, is that after several years of trading at a loss, SPMFT is now trading at a profit. Metrobank also offered us the opportunity to open a Community Investment Account, paying a variable 5.5% interest (which is now down to 3.7%), and is giving us a regular investment income. Our major expense, the gas bill, has reduced during the current year following the replacement of some faulty thermostats. At the time of writing, our gas boiler has failed and is awaiting replacement at Southend Council's expense, and we hope for additional savings from a more efficient boiler.

Gift Aid has been recovered from membership subscription and donations for the last two financial years, and we hope to be able to benefit in the future by additionally recovering Gift Aid on donations received in lieu of admissions.

Last year, 1239 paying adults and 241 children visited the museum. This year, the numbers were 1199 adults and 281 children. However, during the 'experimental' free opening between the 18<sup>th</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> January, the numbers were 1039 adults and 322 children, which brought us extra income of £777 in donations and £268 in sales.

My expectation is that next year's accounts will show an increase in overall income but a dramatic increase in visitor numbers. It is our task to capitalise on our greatly increased footfall to increase sales and donations.

Richard Brown, Treasurer.

July 2024

## WILLIAM J CHIGNALL



William J Chignall (spelt Chignell on most records) was the first Pier Master, and was in situ when the new Iron Pier was completed in 1890.

It is assumed that he was appointed after the Local Board purchased the Pier in 1873.

He was also in charge of the foreshore, which included control of the boats and boatmen loading on the Pier Wharf, the Pier Hill buildings, sea defences, bathing huts and stations, the Pier tramway and tolls on the steamboats.

When told that he was expected to write out the Day Admission tickets and look after the mortuary as well, he complained bitterly.

He was replaced in 1891 soon after the Iron Pier was completed.

He died in 1902 and is buried in St John's Churchyard near the top of Pier Hill.

William Joseph Chignell lived most of his life in Grove Terrace in Prittlewell and had a varied career before being Pier Master, as a licensed victualler and innholder and then a draper.

His son, also William, became a member of Leigh Urban District Council. And was influential in the amalgamation of Leigh into Southend.

### CALLING ALL NUMISMATISTS

Do you have a secret hoard of florins and threepenny bits and would like to donate them to the Museum. They feed our slot machine display which is very popular.



### WHEN WE WORE T SHIRTS TO SAVE THE PIER

Does anyone have a 'Save the Pier' T shirt they would like to donate to the Museum. This was a huge campaign in the 1970s led by Peggie and Ron Dowie following the devastation of the 1976 fire. We would love one of these T shirts to be part of our display.

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

## D-Day at the Pier.

This year's celebrations of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day inevitably bring to mind the rarely-told story of the huge part that Southend's Pier played in the War effort. This extract is written by Sir Alan (AP) Herbert, a wartime MP who patrolled the Thames in his cabin cruiser as a part of the River Emergency Service during WW2. The text is from his small book – 'The War History of Southend Pier', published in 1945 and available in reproduction in the Pier Museum.

'We come to May 1944 - a bustling, bracing month on the River. The United States had invaded the Thames. Off the Pier Head the Stars and Stripes was almost as frequent as the Red Ensign; powerful tugs, harbour craft, landing craft, and the Liberty Ships, the MTs (Motor transports), steaming up to the docks to get their load of vehicles and troops. It was a thrilling thing, one misty afternoon, to meet the first flotilla of LSTs--Landing Ship "Tank." These grand ingenious vessels, designed, I believe, in England but built in America, did wonders in the fight, and were perhaps the most fruitful new vessel of the lot. Their great jaws opened like prehistoric monsters and disgorged thirty tanks.



The mark 2 version of the LST, 327 feet long and with capacity for 20 tanks or 30 smaller vehicles and 150 troops. The draught at the forward end was only 5 feet, ideal for landing as close to the beaches of France as possible. 1052 of them were made in American shipyards to a British design.

There was a lift to the upper deck, and that was crowded too, with smaller vehicles. Some of them flew the White Ensign, but most were manned by the Americans. Now they steamed into the Tilbury Docks, the West India Dock, or to the special ramps that had been built for loading here and there, and to the Limehouse Reach. There, the Americans had a special base for these ships at the Convoys Jetty, above Deptford, where later they suffered severely from the V.1's. There they lay, three deep, a mile or two from the heart of London. American ships of war loading British tanks to drive the Germans out of France. And the heart of London knew nothing about it.

Coming up Limehouse Reach next morning, seeing these ships at their business on either side a few hundred yards from the ruins of Deptford Victualling Yard and the scarred shores of the Surrey Docks, my mind went back to that night of 7th September, 1940, when London River took its worst. It had needed the best part of four years' work, but London River was ready to strike back. The Battle of the Thames was still to finish.

When we saw these things and the MT Steamers massing in the docks, we knew that the Day was near. There were other signs. All down the river, at the wharves and on the buoys, our own small steamers blossomed suddenly with name-boards and numbers - little coasters that seemed too innocent for this affair, but they were at it too, stuffed with oil or ammunition. The big transports came out of the docks, crowded with vehicles and khaki, and made way for others. All the time the

ships were pouring into the River. Those that were ready must, somewhere, wait for the rest, and so the Great Congestion began.

That was an unforgettable scene. There have never been so many ships in London River before; there will never be so many ships in London River again. There were not enough berths in the River for all the ships. They anchored them in long lines down the middle of the lower reaches, in the Northfleet Hope, in Gravesend Reach, in Sea Reach - all the way. Looking down Sea Reach from Holehaven one saw an endless forest of ships transports, hospital ships, landing ships, tankers and barges.

They lay quiet with their distinguishing flags and the pilot flag flying, waiting to go. It was a weary time for the soldiers and the crews. No one was allowed ashore. Between Holehaven and the Mucking Light lay thirty small coasters carrying oil. I called on some of them that were signalling for water or supplies, or needed a boat. They had been lying there ready for eleven days. This could not be avoided: the troops must be loaded last. Indeed, it is a wonder how all this movement and marshalling of ships in the narrow waters was done so smoothly and well. I heard few complaints. I know of no blunders. But the pilots were too few and had a hard time. They were worked to death, and fell asleep on the small craft taking them to the next ship.

By degrees the ships were worked down river towards the mouth - to the domain of Southend Pier. One evening we took "last letters" from the coasters at Mucking, and they got their anchors and slipped down the River to another anchorage below Southend. One morning there would be seven packed transports in Long Reach - in the afternoon they were gone. They went very quietly, these shipfuls of fine troops; there was no cheering, no singing, no waving. I never heard a song from all those ships. They went past without a sound. They looked down at us without a word, the soldiers trying their lifebelts on, or in conference with their officers. All the time, as we watched this moving of the ships, we wondered why the enemy had nothing to say. There were alarms. High-flying spies came over. But they dropped nothing. He had new terrors by then - the "oyster" or pressure mine, for example. A few of these in Gravesend Reach, in Sea Reach, could have wrought fearful damage and delay. We went up and down the River, urging the patient watchers not to relax. Nothing happened.

At Southend, the Commodore and his men had a problem, such as Southend will not see again. All this time the convoy work went on as usual. London must be fed, though Europe be invaded. But, for the D-Day affair, the commercial traffic was handled in the Warp, below the Boom. In other words, the convoy orders must be conveyed to ships four or five miles away, necessary conferences being held in the Commodore's ship whenever the weather and sea made it possible. The Pier staff, as all through these war years, gave all they had, did all they could, of skill and patience in these D-Day preparations.

Inside the Boom everything was "operational." And on the night before D-Day, there were 203 ships in the Southend area inside the Boom. The water was marked off on the chart like a chessboard or "grid." Every square was a berth and every square was numbered. The pilot coming down the River had one of these "grids" and somehow had to get his ship to the appointed berth in the crowd. To relieve the pressure, the Commodore used Nelson's old anchorage on the other side. Imagine, if you can, the coming and going of the small craft that had to serve this huge and scattered fleet-moving the captains and the pilots and the army commanders and meeting innumerable emergency demands. Over fifty small craft were fully employed in this work.

The weather worsened and the River shook its head. It was rough enough in Sea Reach for the small craft going alongside the ships. What of the smaller craft that were to land the soldiers on a hostile beach? But how much longer could the troops be kept on the crowded ships with small accommodation and supplies? If the thing could not happen soon they would all have to be taken ashore again, the great spring released and painfully coiled again. For some days the naval crews in the River had been forbidden to go ashore, and we knew that the thing was due; but on the morning

before the Day, in the rude scowling weather, we made sure that the thing was off. Indeed, on that morning, I saw one of our naval tugs collect a party of seamen granted leave ashore from the small coasters anchored by the Mucking Light.

But on that day, as all the world knows, General Eisenhower, his admirals and generals, made the great decision. On D-Day-1, Monday, 5th June, 1944, at Southend, Commodore Champion summoned eighty-nine masters together with twenty of their escort commanders and four long conferences were held for each of their respective convoys at 1100, 1400, 1800 and 2000. There, among the cardboard pictures, the banana trees and tropical blossoms, before those cool but glowing mariners, the Commodore unrolled the map so many longed to see the map that showed the Beaches of Normandy and the way the ships would go from Southend to the Norman shore, the map that meant the liberation of a Continent, and London River's revenge.

There is a copy of that map on the wall of the Solarium still. There is a copy in this little book. You will see that at H. hour on D-Day there were six different convoys - three of Tank Landing Ships on their way to France, that had come out of London River and spent the last night in the waters of Southend. They sailed, the first of them, at 0200 on the morning of 6th June, and Southend woke up to find that the main part of the vast fleet had gone, though many ships remained, waiting to go in their turn, when the great build-up began. Farther up the river, that day and the next, there was a sense of desolation and emptiness after all the bustle we had seen and shared. The river seemed lonely and dead without those silent shipfuls of soldiers in the fairway. How were they faring and how many would return? And we wondered still what the Luftwaffe were about. Perhaps there was a trap. The first contingents of the army having landed, the enemy would mine the ports and their approaches, prevent the build-up and cut off our men's supplies. We talked almost hopefully of counter-invasion by parachute troops. Nothing fell not a mine, not a parachute. We went about our duties sadly, wishing they had sent us too.

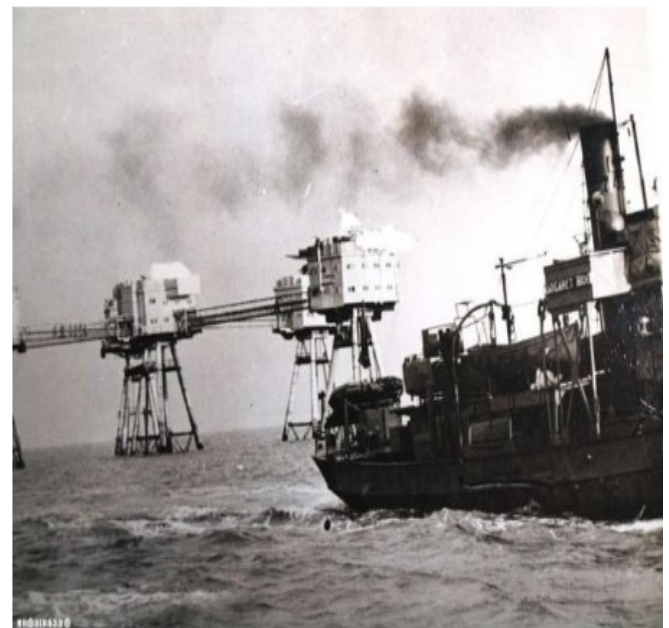
But on the third morning the first ships came back-led by a long line of the LSTs. As they passed the Pier they signalled the number of German prisoners they had on board, and thrilled the weary staff who had done so much to get them to France, and needed no more comfort or encouragement than that. That morning, early, I came out of Holehaven, bound up for London, and saw the noble procession go by. It was a fine sunny morning, with a fresh wind from the west whipping the flood tide into small white horses. All Sea Reach was a-dancing and a-glancing to see the first ships home from Normandy. They came up at a strong speed, with an air of urgency, their pendants streaming bravely in the sun, their bow waves foaming across the reach, their sides black with exhaust-or explosion-prisoners below, bedding and wounded on their decks. It was a warming thing to see them pass. They had crossed the Channel, those queer vessels, they had grounded on the coast of France, where the Germans used to rule; they had opened their elaborate jaws and flung defiance and death at the enemy; they had come back safely and impudently to England, escaping guns and mines and bombs, E-boats, midget submarines and all the rest; and here they were in London River again, bound for Tilbury or Limehouse, for Woolwich or Blackwall, to load their decks with fire and slaughter, and cross the Channel again. But still there was no cheering, no waving, no show. The job was but begun. But we, rolling and tossing in the great wash they made, did humbly and happily salute them.

Next came back the first of the motor transports, the Liberty Ships, the beginning of an endless stream. At Southend Pier, I fancy, none could relax for a very long time. From D-Day onward the drill was eight or nine outward convoys a day. The 'build-up' was the thing, the incessant flow of reinforcements and supplies. It may surprise you - it surprised me; but, by their graphs and statistics, the movements were greater after D-Day than before. Between D-Day and 31st May, 1945, the volume of military stores, ammunition, petrol and the rest, handled in the Port was 2,760,000 tons, including 202,000 tanks and other vehicles. More than 40,000 ships passed in and out. The peak quarter of the whole war was January to March, 1945—11,924 ships; and I make that more than 130 a day.

London River, which for two days had felt herself out of the picture, was very much in it for a very long time. The work done after D-Day, when the first excitement was past, and dogged duty and dull efficiency were the order of the day, was highly meritorious. On the Pier an average of 350 signals were dealt with every 24 hours. There were five teleprinters with ten operators working in watches ; a telephone switchboard with 100 extensions manned always by two operators. "Communications " never slept-throughout the war. It is not for me, in this modest account, to salute or glorify the fine administrative deeds of the Admiralty or the Ministry of War Transport in this affair. No doubt the Admiralty will do that one day. I can speak only of the men I know and the things I saw on the River. I can testify, for example, to the good work of the Royal Naval Auxiliary Patrol, at Cliffe Fort and Tilbury and Greenhithe, whose officers and patrol craft were an ever ready link between the River and the Ministries, passing orders, reporting arrivals, carrying pilots, flashing and flagging, directing or assisting the shipping - a skilled and willing handmaid in the whole affair.'



The Mulberry Harbour built during the days following D-Day at Arromanches in Northern France, to get troops and vehicles off the ships and onto shore as fast as possible. To the right is the 'harbour wall' - around 100 old ships sailed across the Channel and scuttled. Within the harbour can be seen the Phoenix Caissons, floating concrete piers (one of which can still be seen off Thorpe Bay), and the Spud Piers, long pontoons which connected to the land. All of this was part of the huge transport effort mounted, starting on D-Day, and still the largest seaborne invasion in history.



One of the Maunsell forts built downstream from Southend to give warnings of air raids and detect U-boat and mining activities. Around 100 personnel would have been stationed here, and the forts still (mostly) exist, although the walkways between them have been removed.

## CHANGES TO SUBSCRIPTION ARRANGEMENTS—A REMINDER

The membership period is now 1 April to 31 March. So all membership subscriptions would become payable as from 1 April every year.

New members signing up during the 'close' season will be offered membership that includes the next financial year. So, a membership that starts in December 2024 would expire on 31 March 2026.


Your membership for 2024 it will now expire on 31 March 2025.

## WHY NOT VOLUNTEER

As the Pier heads into the autumn months and we intend to stay open until New Year's Day we are looking for more stewards to man the museum. We now get school and other groups on a regular basis and the Museum being quite large does need to be covered by 3 people. On each shift.

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 please get in touch with us at [chairman@southendpiermuseum.co.uk](mailto:chairman@southendpiermuseum.co.uk) or 01702 611214 for a chat.

## TAKE A LOOK AT OUR NEW FILM THE TRAINS OF SOUTHEND PIER



**The trains of Southend Pier**

The film explores the development of the railway on the world's longest pleasure pier.

For almost 200 years Southend has had a pier to enable ships to visit Southend to bring passengers and goods to shore across over a mile of mudflats.


The earliest pier transport was in the form of carts pulled by men, then came horse-drawn carts and trams and after the building of a new iron pier in the 1890s came first the electric railway. There has been 3 generations of railway on the pier since that time and our film tells their story.

For anyone with an interest in railways or the history of this world famous landmark the film is a 'must'. An unedited version was showing in the museum for some time and is a much requested item.

This DVD has been produced by Southend Pier Museum and its volunteers, using film and photos from the museum's collection. Our thanks to all those who have contributed with photos, video, film and information.


Website: [www.southendpiermuseum.co.uk](http://www.southendpiermuseum.co.uk)  
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**SOUTHEND PIER MUSEUM**

**THE TRAINS OF**




**SOUTHEND PIER**

**The trains of Southend Pier**



**All about those very special trains...  
on a very special pier!  
From horse and cart to battery power  
- five generations of the pier railway  
to remember and enjoy**



The cost of the film is £10 + p&p. Special price for members £9 + p&p