

Activity 9 - Could the Great Fire that destroyed Worthing Pier in 1933 have been avoided?

Did you know?

The whole of the Pier except for the Northern Pavilion was destroyed by a fire on the 10th September 1933.

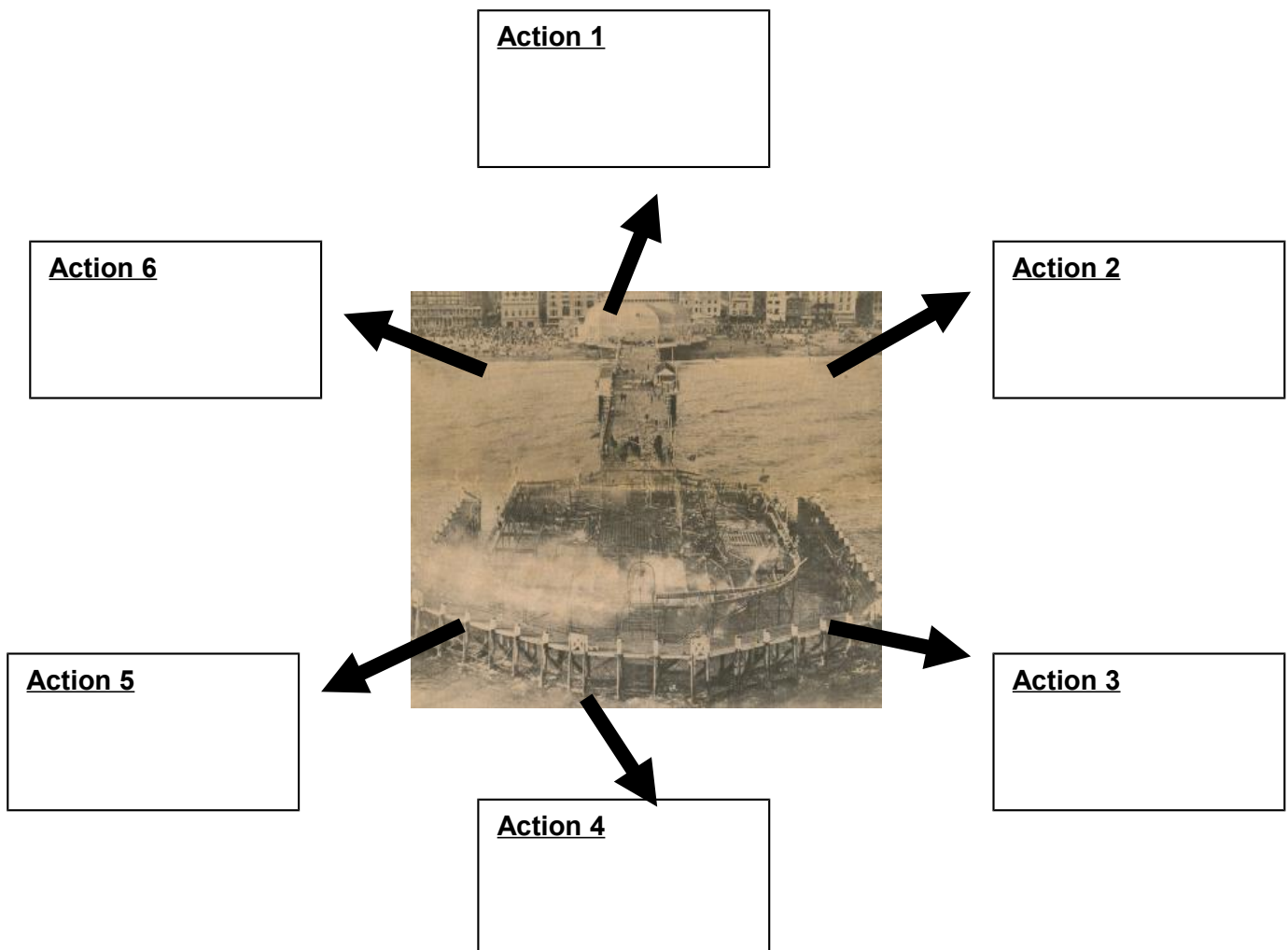
Reports of the fire appeared in both national and local newspapers.

Activity 1: Read the report of the fire printed in the Worthing Herald on the 16th September 1933? Use the information in the report to answer the following questions.

- What do Fire Investigators believe started the fire of 1933?
- Where on the Pier did the fire start?
- Why did the fire spread and destroy most of the Pier?
- In the Pier fire of 1933 nobody was killed or badly injured. What conditions do Investigators believe stopped the fire spreading rapidly and threatening human life?

Activity 2: Could the pier fire of 1933 have been avoided?

You are a member of the Fire Safety Team. Read the newspaper report and recommend 6 actions that would prevent this accident ever happening again?



Activity 3: Avoiding a fire on the Pier in the future

Write a report for Worthing Borough Council members listing the actions that should be taken and by whom to prevent this event ever happening again in the future

Worthing Herald. September 16th. 1933

£10,000 PIER BLAZE MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORSE

Wind Fortunately in a Favourable Direction

UNACCOUNTABLE GAP BEFORE BRIGADE WAS NOTIFIED

Had it not been for the fact that the wind was in a favourable quarter, the fire which destroyed the Southern Pavilion and the end of the Pier on Sunday, doing £10,000 worth of damage, might have been far more serious.

The alarm was given at 3.40 p.m., and the deck only was then alight, but the flames, fanned by a strong wind, spread so rapidly that the Southern Pavilion was involved and was actually razed to the decks in about an hour.

Chief Officer H. J. Jones, of the Worthing Fire Brigade, and the police discount any suggestion of incendiarism. The authorities are satisfied that the probable cause of the fire was a dropped lighted cigarette end which became wedged between the planking of the Pier.

This theory is borne out by the fact that the fire actually started below the decking of the Pier.

DELAY IN CALLING THE BRIGADE

BUILDING WELL ALIGHT BEFORE IT WAS SUMMONED

INCENDIARISM DISCOUNTED AS THE CAUSE

The point in connection with the fire which has been the subject of much comment in the town is the gap between the time when smoke was first seen coming from underneath the Pier and the sounding of the fire siren that summons the brigade.

In some quarters this lapse of time is put at from 15 to 20 minutes. This estimate is borne out by the story of one of the firemen.

He was sitting on the beach with his wife and saw the smoke coming from the end of the Pier. Guessing it to be a big fire, he proceeded to the Fire Station, donned his fire fighting kit, and was waiting there, ready to get off even before the alarm was received at the station.

A "Worthing Herald" representative who was in the Parade bandstand at the time of the outbreak, looked up to see huge volumes of smoke coming from the end of the pier. Half running and half walking he was able to get to the Pier before even the siren sounded to call out the brigade.

The authorities discount any suggestion of incendiarism, and are satisfied that the outbreak was caused by a lighted cigarette end lodging between two boards in the decking, the breeze fanning the lighted end into flames.

Fire Chief's View.

"I see there has been a suggestion that the fire may be due to incendiarism," said Chief Officer Jones to a "Worthing Herald" representative. "I don't think that possible for one minute. If it had been petrol the flames would have been more above than below."

Contrary to persistent rumours in the town that the Pier and Pavilion are only partially insured against fire, the "Worthing Herald" reports that the Southern Pavilion was fully insured.

The following story of the fire is recorded by two "Worthing Herald" reporters who were on the scene within a few minutes of the outbreak being noticed. With other willing helpers they assisted in salvaging furniture and other articles from the burning building, and under the direction of the Chief Officer of the brigade, helped in ripping up the decking of the pier to prevent the fire spreading.

DECKS WATERED EVERY DAY

PIERMMASTER'S PRECAUTIONS IN VAIN

Despite the precautions of the Piermaster, Mr Reg Paine, who has sprayed the decks with water every day during the hot weather, the Pier caught fire in the south-east corner, underneath the seats, and the flames quickly travelled along until a large area was alight.

The fire was chiefly under the decking, so that pending the arrival of the Fire Brigade it was almost impossible to check its progress beyond wetting the surface of the decking.

Many people were seated about the end of the Pier, some taking tea at the Pavilion, and all ran for safety as dense clouds of smoke began to rise from beneath them.

Meanwhile, holiday-makers and other helpers, some with wet towels around their mouths, rushed into the Southern Pavilion and salvaged books, instruments, a grand piano—one of the legs of which had to be ripped off to get it out—plush seats, tables, chairs and other contents.

Prompt Turn-out.

The Fire Brigade, under Chief Officer H. J. Jones, was on the scene within two minutes of the alarm being received, but they were hampered by the well meaning efforts of civilians who were rushing to the Pier to help. These efforts were in vain, however, and the fire rapidly gained the upper hand. Before long the Pavilion was an inferno, with glass cracking in all directions with a noise like a machine gun. Trolleys and even a motor car were run up the Pier and the salvaged goods from the Pavilion were moved back to give the firemen a freer hand.

Attack from Below.

Water was freely played on to the flames from hoses, but seemingly with little effect, and another line was run down below to the iron decking, and the long ladder lashed to the bottom stanchions of the Pier. From this vantage point the brigade was able to deal with the blazing decking far more effectively.

Except for one man left on duty at the station, the whole of the Worthing Fire Brigade was on duty, and to cover the town, in case of another outbreak such as a grass fire, the Brighton Brigade was summoned.

They quickly responded and thousands of people lining the front, attracted by the shooting flames nearly sixty feet high at times, and volumes of smoke, saw the Brighton Brigade make a smart appearance. They ran out a third line of hose from the front and went to the assistance of the Worthing Brigade.

Deck Kipped Up.

Despite all their efforts, the fire continued to rage fiercely, and civilian helpers armed with picks were directed to tear up the decking, leaving only a bridge between the southern section and the main Pier, which could be isolated if the danger increased.


The combined efforts of the firemen began to have an effect, however, and in about an hour the fire had assumed less dangerous proportions, and there was no risk of its spreading.

It was another hour before the fire was properly extinguished, but long before that the firemen had to be withdrawn from underneath the Pier owing to the danger from burning brands falling down upon them. In addition they had to exercise considerable care in walking about the top deck, parts of which were half burned through.

Fall Through Deck.

A young helper, Ronald Clark, of Dominion-road, Worthing, did, in fact, fall through a gap in the decking into the sea, and he was lucky to escape injury. A boat picked him up and put him back on the Pier again where he resumed his work, none the worse for his adventure!

When the ruins had sufficiently cooled to permit investigation it was found that nothing except the iron-work and a few charred pieces of wood remained of the Southern Pavilion, while about two-thirds of the deck at the south bay was gone, exposing the steelwork.



Mr Reg Paine.