

# Worthing Pier in the News!

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Newspaper reports featured in the Worthing Herald between 1960 and the late 1980's.

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**NOT** a lot of people know this but right now we ought to be celebrating the 140th anniversary of Worthing Pier – surely an ideal opportunity to raise our glasses and toast those who had the foresight to grace the town with its most enduring landmark.

Of course, the Worthing Pier we see today is not the original. That rather flimsy structure collapsed in a violent storm 89 years ago. Pier number two was all but destroyed by fire in 1933, though not to the extent of Brighton's recent tragedy.

The pier we enjoy today is a major improvement, although built on almost the same sturdy superstructure as number two and (fingers crossed and finances allowing) may even last into the next century.

Stroll out to the southern end of today's Pier and look back to land and in one sweeping glance you can enjoy a unique panoramic history of our town.

First look westwards, to what was the village of Goring when Worthing was still a mere fishing hamlet. Then take in West Worthing, which was a separate town until a century ago and before that consisted mainly of the village of Hove.

It's not widely realised that in 1897, West Worthing came to within a hair's breadth of getting its own "west" pier to line up with its new and spectacular Grand Avenue. This was meant to be "one in the eye for Brighton" but the plans were aborted at the eleventh hour. Think how, if the property investors had pulled it off, such a development might have altered the way our town evolved in the following hundred years!

Swing your gaze eastwards, past "original" 18th century Worthing, which was bounded by West Buildings (today's Crescent Road), North Street and Ham Road behind the Half Brick hotel.

Directly in line with the pier structure there is still a hint of Broadwater, that ancient village which until early Victorian times was larger and more important than Worthing. Its very old church (even the "mother parish" church of Worthing) used to boast a landmark spire that was a fine beacon for ancient mariners and from which the parish clerk (until the mid-1800s) would give the all-clear signal to his smuggler friends.

Today's seafront buildings in the central area of Worthing still include several that our great-grandparents (and even few great-grandparents) might recognise, though their number is reducing almost annually.

Despite what some preservationists have implied, from an end-of-the-Pier perspective, at least, not all the new buildings along Worthing seafront has had a detrimental effect on the overall picture. Just as much is a matter of personal preference.

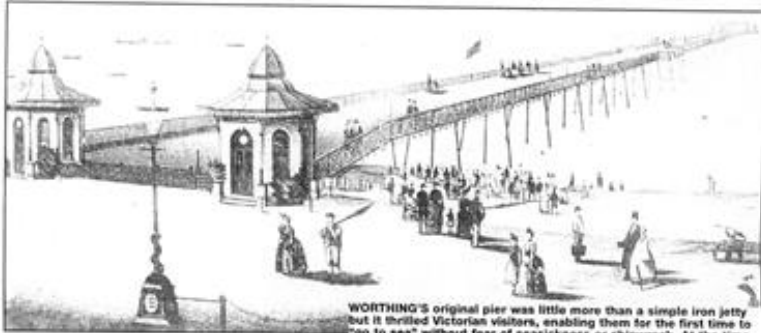
Further eastwards you can visualise there, for many centuries, marshlands at Worthing off from direct access to anchorage and the ancient port of Soreham. In those days it was necessary to first point your horse or cart inland when making for towns to the east, including Brighton. It is ironic that today's main traffic route has reverted to similar line and that any future development may have it even further northwards.

Returning to the original Worthing Pier opened on April 12, 1862, it was a simple jetty 260 feet long, 18 feet wide and stood 10 feet above the water. Based on piles going six feet down into solid chalk.

had a simple toll hut at the land end and a landing stage at the southern extremity.

Never before had Worthing's Victorian population been able to experience the thrill of strolling out over the sea without fear of being shipwrecked or suffering

## Cheers for the Worthing piers



WORTHING'S original pier was little more than a simple iron jetty but it thrilled Victorian visitors, enabling them for the first time to "go to sea" without fear of seasickness or shipwreck. At the time of this view, in 1860, two elegant kiosks had been added at the land end. They survived until today's Pier Pavilion was built in the mid-1920s.

from seasickness. Judging by all contemporary reports during its opening year the innovation provided exceptional pleasure for residents and visitors alike.

Twelve years later, after the initial excitement had worn a little thin, an additional attraction was needed to continue bringing in the pennies to meet its high maintenance costs. So a band of nine musicians was engaged and paid a combined weekly wage of £3 to perform on the pier for three hours a day, "weather circumstances permitting".

"This proved an immediate hit and was followed in 1881 by the Rhine Band, which was contracted to play daily. For the first time, two boylike shelters were built to cover seats for the audience.

In 1888 came the biggest improvement to date. The width of the pier decking was doubled and a 600-seater pavilion built at the southern end for 12,000. The major private enterprise investment seemed fully justified when on the day the new pavilion opened (July 1, 1889) more than 7,000 visitors paid to pass through the turn-

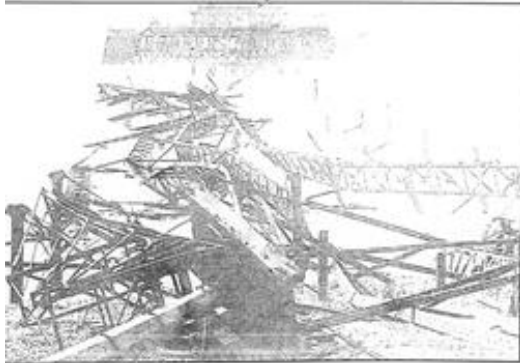
stiles. At the same time, two kiosks replaced the original central kiosk. The left one was used as a bazaar and the other by pier master, Tom Belton, to collect the tolls.

Realising how salt spray rapidly defaced shiny Victorian boots, a shoe-black was also given a patch on the pier and he enjoyed a brisk trade.

The enterprise further widened its appeal in 1891 when a string orchestra was provided by a Mr Mansfield, whose family later ran a music salon in Montague Street and contributed much to Worthing's appreciation of music in the first half of the 20th century.

Soon a busy steamer service was operating between Worthing Pier and other south coast resorts and, occasionally, even across the Channel to France.

Around the same time, plans were considered for the building of a 1,000-seater jaulion and restaurant at the shore end of the Pier and as we know, this was eventually built – but with Worthing's customary caution, not for another 26 years!



THE pier has been an island twice in its 140 years. First time, much of the girder structure was destroyed by a furious storm over the Easter weekend in 1913. The second was in 1940 when a German invasion was believed to be imminent. To prevent enemy use of the Pier for landing troops "friendly" explosives blew up a large centre section.

For more resources visit: [www.worthingpier.org.uk](http://www.worthingpier.org.uk)