

# Worthing Pier in the News!



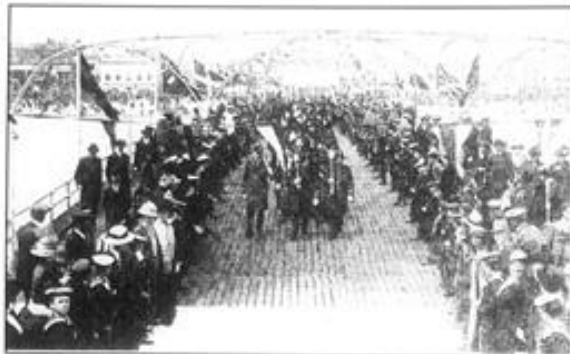
Newspaper reports featured in the **Worthing Herald** between 1960 and the late 1980's.

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## The king takes a stroll on the pier



BY 1907, when the fun-loving King Edward VII had already been on the throne for five years, the company running Worthing pier suddenly realised the public was still more closely identifying their main asset with the much straighter-faced Victorian era.

Swimming from the pier structure was strictly forbidden and a long printed list of rules still forbids a whole range of other activities including "grassy polo and other seaside competitions unless competitors wear proper drawers reaching below the knee".

So in November that year - at the beginning of one of the coldest winters on record - Worthing pier was chosen as the venue for a grand costume roller skating carnival. This included all kinds of intriguing attractions of which serious Victorians would have disapproved, including blindfold boxing and a grand carnival parade.

It was hardly surprising that when King Edward VII paid his second private visit to the town in 1910, to stay with his friend Sir Edmund Loder at seafront Beach House, he took an impromptu stroll along the pier to chat with visitors. Perhaps he wanted to discover what fun he had been missing!

In the same year, Swiss musician, Carl Seebold, came to town and was engaged to perform concerts on the pier with his own Chauxois Orchestra. He would later build not only Worthing's first entertainment complex, the Kursaal (which eventually became the Dome Cinema) but also the relatively palatial

Rivoli and the Pictadrome cinemas in Chapel Road.

The original Worthing pier was blown down during a violent storm over the Easter weekend of 1913 and for several months the pavilion that by now graced the southern end of the structure stood in isolation, while the main spider-like iron girder structure foundered in the waves.

As by now the pier was playing an integral role in attracting holiday visitors to the town its replacement was given a high priority. By May the following year the prosperity of Worthing as a seaside resort was thought to be assured when the Lord Mayor of London, with great ceremony, officially opened the second, much sturdier Worthing pier.

Nobody at that ceremony could have realised that, within a few weeks, Europe would be torn apart by World War One and that for the next four years many who would normally have been beside the seaside would be dressed in khaki.

When peace "and a brave new world" arrived in 1918 it seemed appropriate that Worthing's celebrations should include aquatic sports at the pier head, with high-diving contests, fun on a raft and walking the grassy pole all included.

In 1920, Worthing Corporation bought the pier trust and all from the private Worthing Pier Company. It cost the town £18,978. It proved to be fortunate timing, for the 1920s turned out to be the heyday of British holidays by the sea. Foreign travel was still a luxury for the few but even a relatively poor family could enjoy a day or two by the English seaside. In Worthing pier's southern pavilion, early post-war audiences laughed, applauded and sang-along with the Glad Pilots Concert Party. They moved into the nineteen-twenties to the

dancing and humour of the Mischief Concert Party and the music of Rosabel Watson's Ladies Orchestra.

By 1925 the corporation could not only afford to carry out extensive repairs to the pier but also start building the long-awaited pavilion at the shore end.

The new Pier Pavilion cost £40,000 and was opened on June 25, 1926. It could seat 1,000 people and immediately went into the record books as the home of Britain's only full-time, all-year-round municipal orchestra.

It had various musical directors but it was Herbert Lodge, appointed in 1935, who really set Worthing Municipal Orchestra and the Pier Pavilion on the path of national musical success, with frequent radio broadcasts by the BBC. These continued right up to and during World War Two.

As a young lad returning from Brighton by double-decker bus on a sunny September Sunday afternoon in 1933, I had a grandstand view of an ominous plume of pitch black smoke billowing above Worthing pier, still six miles away. To my dismay, within moments the smoke - billowing from the southern pavilion - had enveloped the entire length of the pier.

Firemen had to unroll hose after hose to get water from the nearest hydrant 500 yards away while more than 200 holidaymakers, many in bathing costumes, helped tear-up planks with picks and crowbars in an attempt to prevent the flames devouring the remainder of the Pier.

By July 1935, a new art deco-style Southern Pavilion arose from the ashes and because it included a solarium fitted with ultra-violet lamps and vitra-glass windows was described as "the sun trap of the south coast."

The total cost of this building was £38,000, of which £13,717 was offset against insurance claims on the burnt pavilion it replaced.

Two years later a new central amusement pavilion was added to the attractions and - perhaps the most beneficial long-term improvement of all - the greatest windbreak was erected along the entire length of the pier.

The pier was closed to the public during most of World War II and with the threat of imminent German invasion after the evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940 the authorities blew a 120-foot wide hole in Worthing pier, to hinder any landing they might attempt.

In the half-century after the war, Worthing Pier and its three pavilions experienced many changes of fortune, most related to the cost of running and maintaining the town's most significant single attraction.

In 1955, after a controversial report that audiences were dwindling, the Municipal Orchestra was reduced to an octet. In March 1958, the Pier Pavilion received a £9,000 facelift and a year later the adjoining Depon-Lounge was built.

By 1964 the pier itself was being described as a "goldmine" but the Pier Pavilion as a "white elephant" - the former making a £5,000 profit but the latter losing nearly £9,000 in the same year.

By 1974 it was estimated the entire pier enterprise was costing every Worthing ratepayer 51p per head per year.

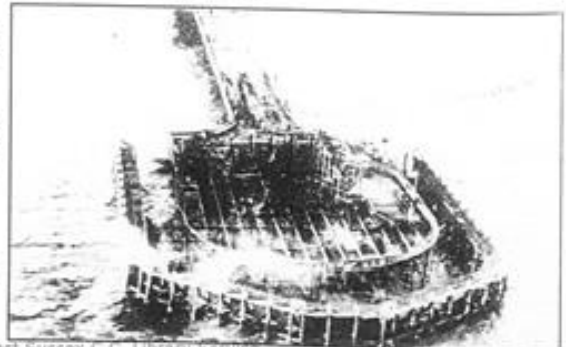
So has Worthing pier with all its trials and tribulations over 140 years been worthwhile? The answer must lie in the number of people who have walked its boards since the first jettie-like structure opened in 1862. All 30 million of them.

TOP: Nobody realised it at the time but when the Lord Mayor of London, Sir T Vansittart Bowater, led this procession of civic dignitaries the entire length of newly restored Worthing pier on May 25, 1914, it would be the final ceremonial "fling" locally in an era which ended abruptly when World War One broke out two months later.

The pier had collapsed during a violent gale over Easter weekend, 1913. Its restoration was achieved in record time and when the Lord Mayor arrived to perform the re-opening ceremony only a year later, thousands of onlookers lined the route and politely cheered him all the way from the station to the pier head.

1914 Worthing fashion note: There's not a single person in this photo of the ceremony who is not wearing a hat!

RIGHT: Rare aerial view of the devastation caused by the fire that swept through Worthing pier's southern pavilion on September 10th, 1933. The present Deco style replacement opened in 1935, with slight modifications carried out in 1986.



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