

The Pier, Cleethorpes

By 1900 some 80, fully fledged piers had been built in the UK. Some towns had 2 or 3 three piers. Ryde, Isle of Wight, in 1814 was the first to be built. Some were built solely for entertainment and novelty and others for purpose of a landing stage for pleasure boats bringing visitors. Others served both functions. Time, erosion, fire and neglect have taken many and 50 piers remain.

The Piers were of various lengths depending on the local topography and though some looked quite utilitarian others sported elaborate pavilions for concerts, dances, shows and exhibitions. The cost spiralled depending on the length of pier and the extent and opulence of added extras. Over time the shareholders started to worry that the returns were slow in materialising and the structures often changed hands.

In Cleethorpes the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway under the Chairmanship of Sir Edward Watkin ensured the future of the pier by leasing it for £450 a year so that it could be included in their plans for improving the resort in 1884 when they constructed Central Promenade to stabilise the fast eroding shoreline and cliff.

Our Pier is central to the identity of Cleethorpes and has hosted many different forms of entertainment and culture over the last 150 years and in 2023 we will acknowledge and celebrate this.

- 1867** The first application to build a pier.
- 1872** Approved again and work could commence.
- 1873** The Pier was opened 4th August, 1873, by Mr A W T Grant-Thorold of Weelsby House, the Chairman of the Cleethorpes Promenade Pier Company and Mr Edward Bannister, Vice Chairman and former Mayor of Grimsby. At 370 metres long with timber construction on iron piers it was slender and elegant. The design was the work of Messrs. J E and A Dowson, Civil Engineers, London. The construction was undertaken by the firm Head Wrightson (1840-1987) for between £8,000 and £9,000. Among other piers which were built by the heavy industrial firm at Thornaby on Tees near Stockton were:-

Redcar Pier for £11,000 and it opened 2 months before Cleethorpes in 1873

Skegness Pier for £20,840 in 1881

Ramsey Pier, Isle of Man, for £40,702 in 1886

St Leonards Pier in Hastings, East Sussex for £30.000, opening in 1893

Herne Bay, Kent, for £60, 000 in 1899

Within 5 weeks of Cleethorpes Pier opening on August Bank Holiday 1873 and 10 years after the railway came through to Cleethorpes, 370,000 visitors had paid 1d each to walk on the pier. The ultimate length of the pier had been dictated by the shallow incline of the beach. Four Bank Holidays per year were legislated for in the 1871 Bank Holidays Act. Seaside resorts in particular were anticipating the huge increase in visitors that this would facilitate. Thousands of factory workers from inland towns connected by the railways were attracted on the Bank Holidays as their places of work were closed.

1875 A landing stage was constructed at the end of the pier for Pleasure Steamers to land and take on board passengers and similar for goods. Rates applied.

1880 John Nuttall was the collector on the Pier. He lived in Victoria Terrace. He is listed as a cab driver, refreshments and boarding house keeper. In 1872 he had bought 5 shares in the Promenade Pier Company.

1884/5 The MSLR under the Chairmanship of the dynamic Sir Edward Watkin financed the building of Central Promenade, 640 metres, to stabilise the coastline and cliff and constructed Ross Castle, a Grotto cafe, a Bathing Establishment, beautiful Cliff Gardens and North Promenade, 402 metres, following the passing of the Cleethorpes Improvement Act of 1881. The firm HB & AF James, Westminster, was appointed for the engineering and construction work. A F James had been involved in much of the work for the MSLR in the area. The Pier was leased to the railway company and an elevated walkway was constructed from the gardens over the promenade. The pier entrance was heightened by 4 metres to allow passage of vehicles along the promenade underneath it. Prince Albert Victor attended the opening ceremony on July 2nd, 1885 and planted a commemorative tree in the gardens. From this year the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway leased the Pier from the Cleethorpes Promenade Pier Company for an annual charge of £450. The Pier entrance was on the inland side of the Promenade and to walk on to the Pier visitors had to pay at the entrance and traverse the walkway over the Promenade on to the pier proper. At around this time the station at

Cleethorpes was enlarged to 6 lines and 4 platforms, a Refreshment Room and other station buildings. Subsequent expenditure by the Railway Company funded a return wall north of North Promenade towards Grimsby Docks to protect the railway from floods, a Refreshment Room, Ticket Office and elaborate Clock Tower, a colonnade with cupola and steps from the station. The visitors had no more than a few steps to take between alighting from the train and standing on the beach.

A pavilion was constructed at the pier head.

1886 The landing platform on the pier suffered damage.

1887 Sir Edward Watkin on behalf of the railway company offered a piece of land at Cleethorpes in the Cliff Gardens and a donation towards the buildings of a Marine Hatchery and Aquarium. Mr Oldham, Chairman of the National Society stated that Grimsby(Cleethorpes) had been approved over other ports on the east coast as best adapted for a fish hatching institute.

The company had been persuaded by Chairman, Sir Edward Watkin that the improvements would greatly increase the numbers of visitors and the popularity of the resort and it did. Between July and September 1887, 211,109 railway passengers visited Cleethorpes. The cost of £100,000 appeared to have been justified.

1888 The pier pavilion was altered to become a concert hall. Dances had been held there with 3 musicians playing. Watkins railway as the new proprietors improved the concert hall by adding a stage and lighting for live performances, variety and concerts. Mr H J Curry, of The Prince of Wales Theatre, was employed to engage acts.

1889 A Fish Hatchery and Aquarium was built on Central Promenade adjacent to the Bathing Pool. It went by the name of the North Sea Exhibition. There was much curiosity about the creatures of the deep and the public flocked to see 'monsters from the deep' such as a whale skeleton, fish eggs hatching and the life cycle of the oyster. It was intended as a fish hatchery, scientific research station an education centre for those in the fishing trade and also as a visitor attraction for Cleethorpes.

1891 ***The Fisheries Fete and Fancy Fair*** was held in 1891 for 2 days in July. The pier was used for much of the entertainment that was offered. The Fair was a promotion for the resort but also of the Continental Service that the MSLR had built on over several years since obtaining the powers to run their own fleet.

The stalls in the Cliff Gardens were named after the steam vessels taking cargo and passengers to a number of Continental ports. One stall, SS Northenden, was named after the home town where Sir Edward Watkin, Chairman of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire railway, lived. Other stalls bore the names of some new vessels which were named after large towns and cities connected to the railway such as SS Huddersfield, Lincoln and Lutterworth. The purpose of the fair was to raise funds for scientific research at the Fisheries Institute.

- 1897** The supporting pillars of the pier were strengthened with steel girders.
- 1901** Sir Edward Watkin died in the same year as Queen Victoria. He resigned as Chairman in 1894 but had remained a Director of the now Great Central.
- 1903** There was a fire in the concert hall on June 29th it was destroyed.
- 1904** The Pier was bought outright by the Great Central Railway, the successor of the MSLR, after 20 years of leasing it. They bought it for £11,250. Great Central also had to pay £25 for the portion of foreshore needed for the new pavilion to The Commissioner of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues, Whitehall.
- 1905** A new Pavilion was constructed nearer to the promenade. Some time later a cafe was constructed on the site of the first pavilion at the head of the pier. An elevated link to the Pier Gardens had been constructed but was removed in 1939 and an entrance on the beach side was built.
- 1909** The first Music Festival was held at the pier.
- 1936** The Pier was sold by the LNER to the newly formed Cleethorpes Borough Council.
- 1940** A section of the pier walkway was blown up by the Army to deter enemy invaders. This was in common with other East Coast resorts with piers. During the war the cafe at the far end caught fire and was destroyed.
- Post 1945** It was not possible to restore the Pier beyond the new Pavilion as the amount of compensation offered by the government was not deemed adequate by Cleethorpes Borough Council. The portion beyond the pavilion was demolished and the Pier was now only one third of its original length at 112 metres. Most of the salvaged timber was used to rebuild the grandstand at Leicester City Football club which had suffered bomb damage. Wonderland benefitted from some timber and steel girders the remainder of almost 300 tons of girders and scrap iron were sent for smelting.

- 1978** The pier sustained some damage in a storm when gales and a high tide breached the sea defences in some places, damaged the Bathing Pool, and flooded some houses. 150 vulnerable and elderly people were marooned in the pavilion whilst attending a pantomime.
- 1981** The pier was sold to Funworld of Skegness then resold.
- 1985** Nightclub owner Mark Mayer bough the pier and opened Pier 39 but sold it in 1988
- 2005** There was a Management buyout.
- 2010** Brian Ilsley bought the pier and leased it out. The Pier nightclub opened but was shut down a year later after rowdiness and violence was reported.
- 2013** A local businessman, Brian Huxford, bought the Pier and undertook an extensive renovation. New uses for the venue such as a conference and wedding venue were explored but ultimately the Pier was sold in 2016 and it is now Papa's Fish and Chip Restaurant. This is the biggest Fish and Chip restaurant in the world and it can seat 500 people.
- 2016** The Pier was voted Pier of the Year by the National Piers Society
- 2020** New metal gates were erected at the Pier entrance. The covid pandemic struck but Papas managed to survive and thrive.
- 2023** The pier celebrates its 150th year.

