



# FRIENDS OF THE OLD PIER SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER 67 | SUMMER 2024 | £1.50 (FREE TO MEMBERS)

WORKING TO SAVE **BIRNBECK PIER** FOR THE NATION

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The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributor, and not necessarily those of the Society.

[www.birnbeck-pier.co.uk](http://www.birnbeck-pier.co.uk)



**A**t last, at last, at long last, in the very near future, we will see actual physical movement with the restoration of the buildings on the landward side of the site.

In a phased project, these refurbishments include:

- The piermaster's house
- The toll booth
- The pier gates
- The building known as 'Memories'
- The building known as 'PierView'

Whilst, new buildings will be:

- Café
- Toilet block

Hopefully, this work will be completed by the summer of 2025 - if not, North Somerset Council (NSC) will lose the Government's Levelling-Up grant.

Alongside this work, the RNLI will be undertaking the repair and refurbishment of:

- The bridge from the mainland to the island
- The former lifeboat station
- The slipway leading to the causeway

In addition to this work, they will be building a new operations centre, utilising the eastern end of the main building on the island.

It is proposed that the old concrete structure, which was originally built to provide shelter for ferry passengers, with its upper deck also being used as a sun terrace, should be removed.

I believe that the Birnbeck Regeneration Trust (BRT) will have control of these open spaces and buildings on the island:

- Large concrete space on the southern side of the island which will be retained
- The north, south and western sides of the of the main building
- The small RNLI building
- The Clock Tower

The awards recently made to NSC are obviously not enough to complete the project and it will require further funding.

As a result of which, the BRT are now being consistently challenged to prove to the powers that be that they have the in-depth knowledge to carry this project forward to a successful conclusion.

I believe that they have and must be given control to prove it.

I wish to thank all members of the Friends of the Old Pier Society for their patience and support over the last few years, especially when we seemed to be going nowhere fast.

We will now be able to see the project start to physically move forward - and will know where to apportion blame should it not do so.

**Charles McCann**, Chairman

## SHOP

The Birnbeck Regeneration Trust's hub, in the shipping container near PierView, stocks a wide range of Old Pier souvenirs, including prints, badges, tea towels, tote bags, and a selection of china (teapots, teabag tidies, coasters, fridge magnets, cruet sets, and tealight holders). Their Facebook page is a good place to keep up-to-date with newly launched items and the latest Birnbeck news. The sponsor a plank scheme has also been relaunched:

<https://birnbeckregenerationtrust.org.uk/plaque-for-a-plank>



## THIS ISSUE'S COVER

With thanks to Mike Pitt, who has kindly supplied a couple of delightful photos from his family archive (see our Letters page on page 10).

# PROGRESS REPORT

**B**irnbeck Pier, a significant historical structure located in Weston-super-Mare, has garnered attention due to its deteriorating state. Since gaining ownership, North Somerset Council (NSC) has spearheaded a comprehensive restoration project. This report provides an overview of NSC's acquisition of the pier, the collaborative efforts of various organisations involved in the restoration, financial contributions received, and future plans for the pier.

Birnbeck Pier, the only pier in the country that links the mainland to an island, was constructed in the 1860s. With its rich history and architectural significance, the pier has been on the Heritage at Risk Register for several years due to its poor condition. This report delves into the progress made by NSC in restoring Birnbeck Pier since taking ownership.

## ACQUISITION

NSC secured ownership of Birnbeck Pier in a decisive move to save the historic structure from further decay. The acquisition process involved complex legal negotiations and was supported by both local and national heritage bodies. The council's proactive stance and commitment to the pier's restoration marked a pivotal turning point in preservation efforts.

## ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

The restoration project is a collaborative venture involving several key organisations such as:

NSC (the lead organisation responsible for the overall restoration project); Historic England (providing expert advice); the RNLI (after many years of investigation of over 20 sites in and around Weston it was decided that Birnbeck Island offers the charity the safest and most effective place for the volunteer RNLI crews to launch and recover their lifeboats safely whilst providing a lifesaving service at all stages of tide); Birnbeck Regeneration Trust (a local charity focused on the restoration of, and sustainable future for, the pier); National Lottery Heritage Fund (offering financial and strategic support).

## FINANCIAL AWARDS

The project has attracted financial awards and contributions from various entities, ensuring the required funding for restoration works. Key financial contributors include:

National Lottery Heritage Fund (significant grants awarded to support initial restoration phases and feasibility studies); Historic England (contributed financial aid specifically earmarked for urgent repair works and structural assessments); local fundraising initiatives (efforts organised by Birnbeck Regeneration Trust and community volunteers have generated substantial funds towards the project).

## PROGRESS

Since gaining ownership, NSC has made notable strides in the restoration of Birnbeck Pier:

Condition surveys (comprehensive surveys

conducted to assess the current state of the pier and identify critical areas needing repair); emergency stabilisation works (immediate actions taken to stabilise the most vulnerable sections of the pier, preventing further deterioration); project planning (detailed restoration plans developed, outlining phased approaches to repair, restore, and revitalise the pier).

## FUTURE PLANS

The project team has submitted several forward-looking plans to ensure the long-term sustainability and functionality of Birnbeck Pier.

Phased restoration approach (a multi-phase restoration plan that addresses structural repairs, aesthetic enhancements, and the integration of modern amenities); community engagement (initiatives to involve local communities in the restoration process, enhancing public support and participation); sustainable development (plans to develop sustainable tourism opportunities around the pier; ensuring economic viability and ongoing maintenance funding).

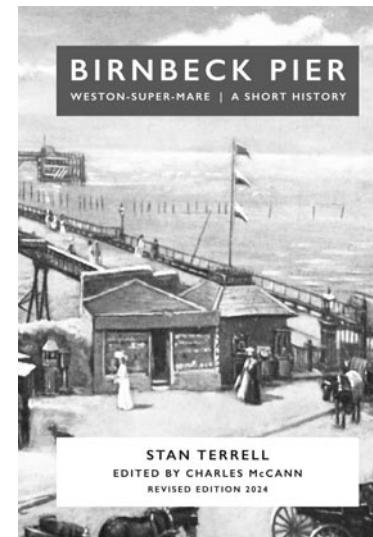
## CONCLUSION

This report aims to show the significant progress made in the restoration of Birnbeck Pier under the leadership of NSC. The information compiled here reflects available data at the time of writing and will require updates as the project advances.

The efforts spearheaded by NSC in restoring Birnbeck Pier have showcased a commendable commitment to heritage preservation. Through effective collaboration, substantial financial awards, and meticulous planning, the project is set to restore the pier to its former glory.

Continued support and engagement from all stakeholders involved will be crucial in realising the full potential of this historic landmark.

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## HISTORY BOOK NEW EDITION

Our book, *Birnbeck Pier - A Short History*, has been refreshed, expanded, and fully updated for 2024.

Proudly printed in Weston, it's available from our website ([www.birnbeck-pier.co.uk](http://www.birnbeck-pier.co.uk)) for just £5.95 plus postage.

## A Word from the Secretary...

**W**e have been waiting patiently for news on when the work on the landside of the pier will start.

Planning permission should have been submitted just after Easter and usually takes two weeks, so things should start to move by the beginning of June.

The powers that be on North Somerset Council are thinking that the piermaster's

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house should be completed by June or July next year, as they must spend the Levelling-up Fund award by, as it stands, August this year - so all systems go!

Exciting times! Things are finally on the move.

Remember you can go on the Birnbeck Regeneration Trust website and watch their webcam:

[www.birnbeckregenerationtrust.org.uk/webcam](http://www.birnbeckregenerationtrust.org.uk/webcam)

Thanks so much everyone for your patience and continued support.

**Lesley McCann**

Secretary

## OUR WEBSITE

The society's website has served us well, but is now very old. At a guess, it was built about 15 years ago - which, in website terms, is fairly prehistoric!

Our Webmaster, Keith Peacock, has generously given his time over that period to build and maintain the site. Keith has now retired from his web design business and although he's happy to continue looking after the site, it's probably a good time to think about the society having a nice shiny new one!

The editor is happy to take on this project when time allows, but if there is a society member, or someone they know, that could provide a robust, cost-effective, professional-looking website, then do please get in touch with him.

## PIER PARTNERS



**North Somerset Council (NSC)**  
purchased Birnbeck Pier and  
Island in July 2023 thanks to  
£400,000 funding from the RNLI.

The purchase means NSC and the RNLI can start work jointly on the restoration of Birnbeck Pier and Island. They would like to thank all partners, funders and supporters who are making this project possible. This includes:

- The UK Government's Levelling-Up Fund for providing £4.4 million.
- National Heritage Memorial Fund for providing £3.55 million of emergency funding from the UK Government Cultural Assets Fund (CAF) to help strengthen the pier legs and create an interim walkway onto the island.
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund for an initial grant of £234,761 to enable plans to progress for a full grant application of £4.2 million at a later date.
- Historic England for contributing £1 million to the restoration works.

North Somerset Council is working closely with the Birnbeck Regeneration Trust who it is planned will manage the site in a staged process once restoration works are complete, starting with the opening of the restored piermaster's house.

The current anticipated Birnbeck Pier project timeline (as of April 2024):

**Autumn/winter 2024 to summer/autumn 2025:** Repair and renovation work to the landside buildings, repair the island sea wall, stabilise the pavilion.

**Spring/summer 2025 to spring/summer 2026:** Pier deck construction and repair work to strengthen the pier.

**Spring/summer 2026 to summer/autumn 2027:** Building work to create a new RNLI lifeboat station and visitor centre.

**The RNLI is a charity that saves lives at sea. Its volunteers provide a 24-hour search and rescue service around the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland coasts.**

It operates over 238 lifeboat stations in the UK and Ireland and more than 240 lifeguard units on beaches around the UK and Channel Islands. The organisation is independent of the Coastguard and Government and depends on voluntary donations and legacies to maintain its rescue service.

Since the RNLI was founded in 1824, its lifeboat crews and lifeguards have saved over 142,700 lives.

A lifeboat station in Weston at this point in the Bristol Channel is a key life-saving asset. Since 2000, the volunteer crew at Weston have launched 1,064 times, aided 572 people and saved 85 people's lives.

The RNLI were forced to leave Birnbeck in 2014 after the pier was deemed too dangerous. After many years of investigation of over 20 sites in and around Weston, Birnbeck Island offers the charity the safest and most effective place for the volunteer RNLI crew to launch and recover their lifeboats. It is the only place that the volunteers can safely provide a lifesaving service for the town at all stages of tide.

**The UK government's Levelling-Up Fund is designed to invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK. The £4.8 billion fund will support town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets.**

Levelling-Up means different things in different areas. The fund has supported 216 projects across the UK with funding so far - helping community groups protect important local landmarks, such as pubs, sports clubs and community hubs.

In January 2023, NSC announced that Weston-super-Mare would benefit from a £20 million investment thanks to a successful bid to the UK Government's Levelling-Up Fund. More information can be found in the news release distributed at the time about the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF).

The NHMF was set-up in 1980 to save the most outstanding parts of our national heritage, in memory of those who have given their lives for the UK. NHMF receives annual grant-in-aid of £5 million from the UK Government to help save some of our most-loved treasures - such as paintings, natural heritage, maritime and industrial vessels, and historic houses - from being lost forever.

Any funds remaining from NHMF's annus allocation at the end of the financial year remain available to the NHMF to award grants to exceptional heritage treasures such as the Portrait of Mai (Omai), The Artist Rooms, Titian's Diana and Acteon, the Honresfield Library, Tyntesfield Estate, and Wentworth Woodhouse.

**[www.nhmf.org.uk](http://www.nhmf.org.uk)  
@NationalHeritageMemorialFund  
#NationalHeritageMemorialFund**

**The National Lottery Heritage Fund grant applications over £250,000, assessed in two rounds. Birnbeck Pier has initially been granted round one development funding of £234,761, allowing it to progress with its plans.**

Detailed proposals are then considered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund at a second round, where a final decision is made on the full funding award of £4,290,442.

As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, The National Lottery Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future, as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033.

Over the next 10 years, the Heritage Fund aims to invest £3.6 billion raised for good causes by players of the National Lottery, to bring about benefits for people, places and the natural environment.

The Heritage Fund helps protect, transform and share the things from the past that people care about, from popular museums and historic places, our natural environment and fragile

species, to the languages and cultural traditions that celebrate who we are.

The Heritage Fund is passionate about heritage and committed to driving innovation and collaboration to make a positive difference to people's lives today, while leaving a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy.

**[www.heritagefund.org.uk](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk)  
@HeritageFundUK  
#NationalLotteryHeritageFund**

**Historic England are the public body that helps people care for, enjoy and celebrate England's spectacular historic environment, from beaches and battlefields to parks and pie shops.**

They protect, champion and save the places that define who we are and where we've come from as a nation, caring passionately about the stories they tell, the ideas they represent and the people who live, work and play among them.

Working with communities and specialists, they share passion, knowledge and skills to inspire interest, care and conservation, so everyone can keep enjoying and looking after the history that surrounds us all.

**[www.historicengland.org.uk](http://www.historicengland.org.uk)  
@HistoricEngland  
#HistoricEngland**

**The Birnbeck Regeneration Trust is a charity established in 2004 with the objective to preserve the natural, historical, architectural and constructional heritage of Birnbeck Pier, Island and surrounding local**

**area for the benefit of the people of Weston-super-Mare and the nation.**

Aligned with the Friends of the Old Pier Society, the trust engaged with various previous owners to try to facilitate Birnbeck's restoration. A renewed collective effort has revitalized the trust since a Repairs Notice and Compulsory Purchase Order process started, culminating in NSC taking ownership in 2023.

Once work is complete, the aim is for NSC to remain as freeholder, with the trust and the RNLI its tenants.

**North Somerset Council is a unitary authority located in the south-west of England. Birnbeck Pier is located in Weston-super-Mare, one of four towns in North Somerset.**

There are four piers in North Somerset, of which Birnbeck Pier is one of three in Weston-super-Mare. It is also one of only six Grade II\*-listed piers in England and the only one to link to an island in the UK. There are four further Grade II structures and buildings located on the island and the landward end of the site.

You can also find out more about the wider place-making plans for Weston-super-Mare at:

[www.n.somerset.gov.uk/birnbeckpierproject](http://www.n.somerset.gov.uk/birnbeckpierproject) [www.n.somerset.gov.uk/placemaking](http://www.n.somerset.gov.uk/placemaking)

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## LETTERS & EMAILS

### What fantastic news regarding the Old Pier!

It prompted me to start looking through my old 'family' photos and I found these two of myself aged 16 months (with my mom) from September 1959! According to the note my father made on the reverse of one, the steamer in the background is 'the Cardiff ferry'.

Hope to find more soon, but dad wasn't a keen photographer by any standards!

**Mike Pitt**  
Royal Sutton Coldfield



Thanks for this newsletter with its very welcome news on change of ownership. Thanks also for the interesting postcard reproductions. With regard to the calendar on page 16, what you thought might be some kind of trolleybus is actually two trams of the Weston-super-Mare and District Electricity Supply Company's system, which had a terminus at the pier.

The tramway was open from 1903 to 1937 and while there were 12 open-top double-decker trams, there were also four single-decker open-sided cross bench cars, numbered 13 to 16, of which two can be seen in this picture. They had 44 seats and were built in 1903.

An extract from the Wikipedia entry for the tramway concerning these particular cars states:

"Also delivered in 1903 were 4 single-deck cars, which the driver again operated from an open platform. The sides of the cars were open but a red-and-white striped curtain could be let down in bad weather to give passengers some protection. 'Cross benches' were fitted right across the body for the passengers to sit upon, and a footboard was fitted along each side which the conductor walked on while the car was moving so that he could sell tickets. Two slightly larger single-deck cars were delivered in 1927".

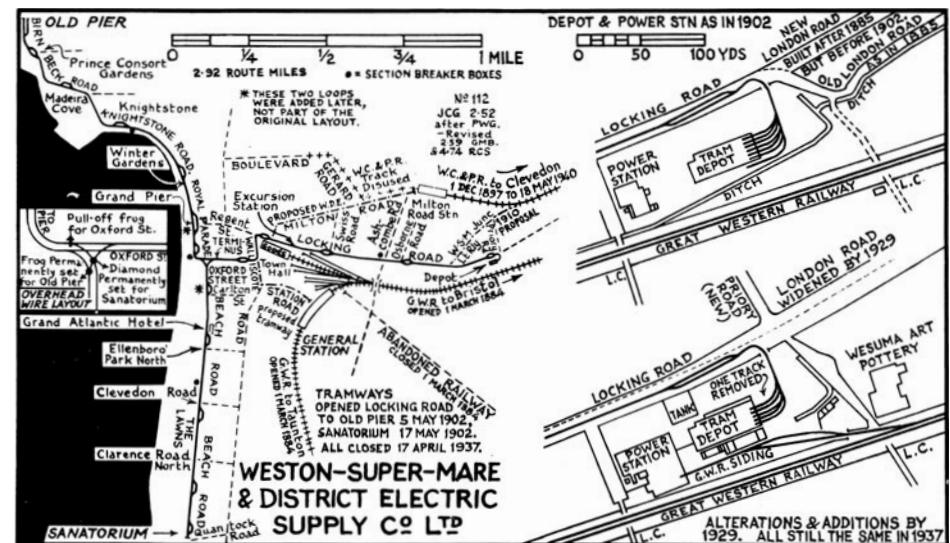
The source given is Colin Maggs' 1974 book *Weston-super-Mare Tramways*, which unfortunately I don't have a copy of.

**Martin Meredith**  
via email

## WESTON'S TRAMWAYS

After receiving Martin Meredith's informative email on the subject of Weston's tramways, see opposite, the editor purchased the book *Weston-super-Mare Tramways* on a well-known internet auction site.

Published by Oakwood Press, now owned by Stenlake Publishing, and no longer in print, we will be reproducing a series of extracts from it, thanks to the kind permission of Richard at Stenlake Publishing.



**W**eston-super-Mare is a Bristol Channel resort which has mainly developed since the coming of the broad gauge Bristol & Exeter Railway on 14 June 1841. It is mentioned in Domesday as Westone, and the adoption of the town's present name with Latinisation dates from the late fourteenth century.

In 1812 Weston was a small fishing village with a population of 160 living in 24 houses; by 1901 the population had grown to 19,845 in 4,175 houses, while after the opening of the electric tramways the population reached 23,235 in 1911, and 31,653 in 1921, with the influx of summer visitors increasing the figure to an estimated 60,000 and the 1931 census showed 28,555 and an estimated summer population of 80,000.

In 1826 an esplanade was built, with a sea wall running from Knightstone to the end of Regent Street. In 1887 it was replaced by the present promenade with seats and shelters at frequent intervals and extending for a distance of about two miles from the Old Pier to the Sanitorium. Shops are grouped in the centre of the town.

Weston was, and still is, a seaside resort much frequented by visitors from Bristol, the Midlands and South Wales, many of those from the latter area, formerly arriving by paddle steamers of the various fleets.

In 1882 an abortive proposal was made for a 3ft 6in steam tramway to run from Locking Road and the Great Western Railway station to Regent Street, Royal Parade and the Old Pier, while a branch was to run from Knightstone Road to the Boulevard and the Locking Road / Regent Street junction.

Under the electric lighting Acts of 1882 and 1888, and especially the Weston-super-Mare Electric Lighting Order 1891, the Urban District Council received authorisation to supply electrical energy for all private and public purposes within the urban district of Weston-super-Mare, and by an indenture dated 30 November 1899, the UDC transferred their liabilities to the Weston-super-Mare and District Electric Supply Company Ltd. (WSMDES), a subsidiary of British Electric Traction. In order to maximise their investment, WSMDES pressed for the operation of an electric tramway.

This was not the first electric tramway scheme, for a Weston-super-Mare Tramways Act 1897 had been acquired by Drake & Gorham Co. Ltd. Powers expired in August 1899, and the UDC withheld its consent for extension of time since there were benefits to be gained from the electric supply and the tramways working in

association - the UDC only need deal with one body for lighting and traction, trenches and street works serving both needs. Street columns could be used for electric light purposes, one generating station satisfying the needs.

The Weston-super-Mare Tramways Order 1900 allowed a 4 ft 8½ in gauge tramway along the promenade from the Sanitorium to Old Pier. From approximately the centre of this line, a branch ran at right angles through the town along Regent Street to the depot and power station in Locking Road. Other branches were to run to the GWR station; and along Ashcombe Road to the Milton Road station of the Weston, Clevedon & Portishead Railway, which had been opened on 1 December 1897.

Railway coaches were not to be used on the tramway. This stipulation was inserted as the WC&PR might well have sought access to the sea along the tramway. The 1900 Order was confirmed by Tramways Orders Confirmation (No. 5) Bill, (Weston Order) 6 August 1900. The following year, powers were sought for a line traversing Oxford Street instead of Regent Street. This was confirmed by the Tramways Orders Confirmation (No. 4) Act, 1901 which received Royal Assent 9 August 1901, time allotted for completion being two years.

The Weston-super-Mare tramways were authorised by Orders held in perpetuity, subject to the right of the local authority to purchase at the expiration of a period of 10, 16 or 22 years from 31 December 1899 for their fair market value, or at the expiration of 28 years from 6 August 1900 on terms of Section 43 of the Tramways Act 1870. Beyond 1928, the UDC could purchase the system after any subsequent period of 7 years.

Messrs. Robert W. Blackwell began the active work of preparing the road bed and laying the

lines on 24 January 1902 and on 27 January 150 men were employed on the task. Contrary to the townsfolk's expectations, the navvies generally behaved very well, though on Sunday 8 March, many workmen were not permitted to work after lunch because of their intoxicated condition. In April when their work was completed, the navvies voluntarily collected 14s 7d for Weston General Hospital where several of them had received treatment.

The basalt blocks for laying between the rails were brought by sea to Knightstone pier. One councillor complained that this form of pitching would create traffic noise and when it was pointed out to him that the council had previously approved the blocks, he said, "I thought the sample basalt block would be ground up and the dust put between the tracks"!

In spite of it being understood that no more than a hundred yards of road could be opened at a time, half a mile of road was up for laying in Locking Road and so congested was the traffic, that even controlled by a policeman, vehicles were delayed for up to half an hour. The space available for passing traffic was barely the width of a cart, and on 15 March it was reported that the pier bus drawn by a pair of horses had to mount the pavement in Manilla Crescent to pass another vehicle. The seats on the roof came into contact with an overhanging tree and the front part of the bus was completely lifted off the ground. The branch had to be cut off to free the bus. Horse bus routes ran from the WC&PR station to Birnbeck Pier and also to the Sanitorium. The fare in both cases was 2d and ten trips were worked each way daily.

The 150-200 labourers were paid 5½d an hour and shortly before midday on 13 February 1902, they struck for an increase to 6d an hour. The men working on the sea front near the Knightstone pier began the strike and although a number were satisfied with the pay, they downed tools as they were afraid of violence, 'processed' along Locking Road and persuaded their colleagues there to strike as well. They then marched to the offices of Messrs Blackwell in North Street where their demand was refused. Four or five men continued to work without molestation.

On 17 February it was ascertained that a large number of navvies had left the town, whilst there was a considerable influx of navvies into Weston from other places, so operations resumed that day, at 5½d per hour - the old rate. When re-engaging hands, preference was given to newcomers, but to make up the number required, several men not prominent in the strike were allowed to resume work.

On 25 March 1902 WSMDES sent a letter to the Board of Trade stating that the principal line was finished and would be ready for inspection after the Easter holiday:

*"The branch line from Oxford Street to the Sanitorium will not be ready for some time to come, but this line is not so important just now. We are most anxious to open the line from the Great Western Station to the Pier as soon as possible as the service of steamers from Cardiff and Penarth starts on 27 inst. and therefore there is great demand for the tramway. We should*

esteem it a favour if your inspector would be able to make it convenient to come down to Weston on Thursday April 3rd'.

Unfortunately for the tramway company, the request could not be met.

On 11 April 1902, two cars went out on a trial run where the only setback was a trolley dewirement in Oxford Street. Major Von Donop and Mr. A. P. Trotter inspected the line for the Board of Trade on 12 April when a car was driven by Withycombe, Clerk of Works, from the Town Hall to the Pier and back to the generating station. Large crowds gathered to see the car go through the town. Von Donop criticized the unevenness of the rail level with the road surface.

A request to run trailer cars was rejected in view of the narrowness of some of the streets through which they would have had to run.

Mr. S. G. Leech, Engineer to the WSMDES, was appointed Manager of the tramways. On 2 May, he received intimation that the Board of Trade certificate had been granted and on 5 May the local press and members of the UDC were invited to travel on the first car. It left Ashcombe Road at noon and reached the Old Pier in 12 minutes, frightening spirited horses en-route:

*"As the car proceeded, proprietors of cabs and wagonettes whose trade was threatened by the advent of the electric car, threw uncomplimentary epithets at the councillors. At the pier, the temperance section of the party drank in the sea breezes and the beauties of the panorama, while the others went to the Pier Hotel for the toast - success to the tramway."*

The party arrived back at Ashcombe Road at 12.30. On the first day five cars operated a ten

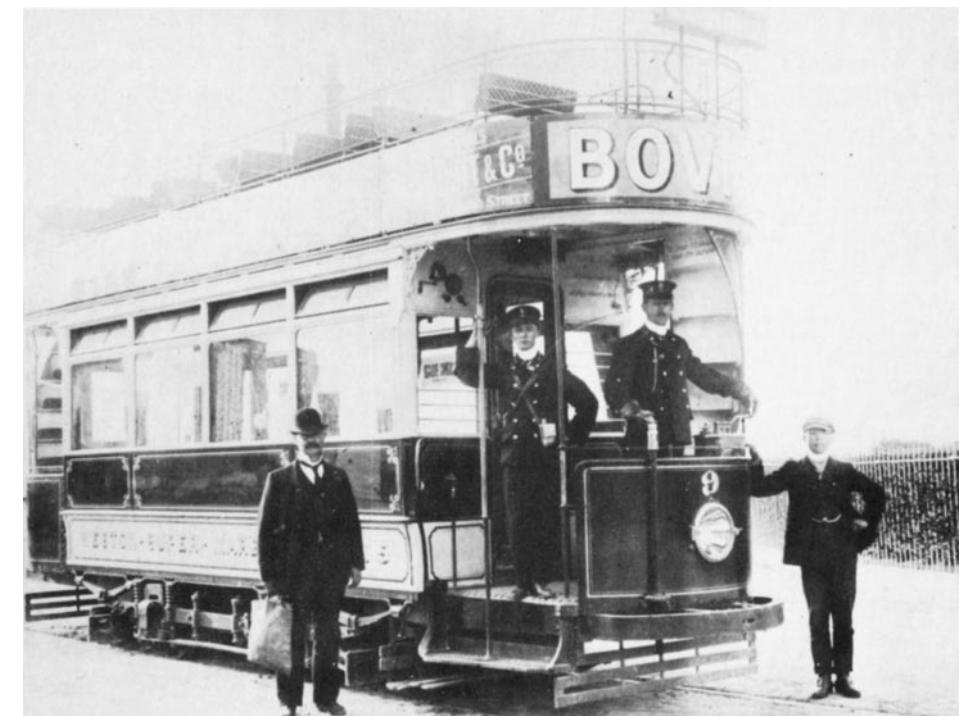
minute service between St. Saviour's Church, Locking Road and the Pier; carrying 3,973 passengers, the company's takings amounted to over £30 in fares.

The tramway was officially opened on 13 May 1902 at the same time as the Pavilion and Swimming Bath, the electric cars taking guests free of charge from the Town Hall to a luncheon at Knightstone. The cars were gaily decorated, the upper portions being encircled with drapery and fluttering flags.

The Oxford Street to Sanitorium section was used for the first time on Whit Eve, 17 May 1902. Eight cars run on Whit Monday and carried 12,593 passengers. One wit remarked that the sea front at Weston now looked like 'an elongated clothes line'. One lodging house keeper complained of the noise of the cars negotiating the Oxford Street / Beach Road corner and said that one family had left saying they were going to a quieter resort. During the first few months of tramway operation the National Telephone Company complained that the tramways were causing interference with their wires. The twenty-two tramway bye-laws came into force on 1 November 1902.

On 10 September 1903 a great storm sent tidal water quite a way inland, almost as far as the free library in the Boulevard. Many streets were inundated and several trams were caught in the floods at Claremont. Motorman Arthur Granville while driving through the flood, experienced a violent shock, fell from the platform into the water and was taken to hospital in a state of collapse. Passengers on the car were marooned for an hour or so. The conductor of this car was L.V. Marshall, later to become the company's Chief Inspector.

In 1904 the Great Western Railway and the Grand Pier Company proposed that the



**Car No. 9 at Sanatorium in 1902.  
This number ceased to exist after 1904.  
(Image: C. Poole)**

tramways should run from the station out to the pierhead - the Grand Pier at that time was longer and stretched out to deep water; but the great drawback to the scheme was that neither the pier nor the tramway company had powers to lay track across the Promenade, and the UDC would probably not have granted permission.

In May 1907 the Managing Engineer of the Grand Pier repeated his request for trams to run on the pier; but WSMDES replied that they could not entertain the proposal. Perhaps to counter Grand Pier competition, a letter was received from the Old Pier company dated 14 February 1906 proposing an extension of the tramway on to the Pier company's private road, thus shortening the walk from ship to

tramway. On 5 June 1908 Col. Von Donop inspected and passed a 36 foot long siding to bring the tramway to the entrance to the pier's private road.

In September 1913 the directors considered and adjourned the question of running motor buses in the district.

**In the next edition, we will hear about the trams during World War I, and take a more detailed look at the tramcars themselves.**

# THE AGM

## 4 November 2023

Meeting opened 2pm.

The Chairman welcomed everyone.

Apologies: Janet Stephen, John Evans, Christine & Peter Jessop, Carey Copeland, Robert Graves.

Approval of the minutes of last year's AGM:

Proposed: R Armstrong  
Seconded: J Dunne  
Carried.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chairman's Report

Since our last AGM there has been, at last, movement in obtaining ownership of the Old Pier site from the previous owner CNM Estates.

The following has occurred: On 13 July 2023, CNM Estates withdrew their opposition to North Somerset Council's compulsory purchase action and agreed to the sale of the Old Pier site for the sum of £400,000.

Also, a 10-year lease for 38 car parking spaces, split between Birkett Road car park and the Melrose car park, was agreed.

The lease will revert to North Somerset Council (NSC) if CNM fail to develop the site and have 'First Occupancy' status before the 10 year lease expires.

North Somerset Council continued with its Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) action against CNM Estates and the result of this saw, on 21 September 2023, the Secretary of State for Culture Media & Sport signing the CPO in favour of NSC.

What funding is available to restore the pier?

The Council, working with the RNLI and the Birnbeck Regeneration Trust (BRT), have been successful in securing several major grants to help rescue the pier and restore some of the buildings.

The Friends of the Old Pier Society hold two posts of nominated trustees. These positions are currently held by the chairman and secretary of our society, so we will always have a say in the future of the Old Pier.

This organisation has received several funding awards, of which the three main grants are:

The National Heritage Memorial Fund, which has offered £3.55 million towards the emergency works phase of repair to the pier.

This phase proposes to strengthen the pier 'legs' and create an interim walkway, which will enable the RNLI to re-establish a lifeboat station on the island which has much better access to the water and makes it easier and quicker for them to launch their boats. This phase will also allow public access to Birnbeck Island.

The Levelling-up Fund award is from the

Government and has been awarded to North Somerset Council to deliver several projects in Weston-super-Mare. Of which, £4.47 million of this has been earmarked for the Birnbeck site.

numerous listed (and unlisted) 'At Risk' buildings and structures, and support the rare protected marine landscape that surrounds the site.

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The project must create a mix of uses and activities that generate sufficient income to cover the costs of operating the pier in the long-term; we must remember the abnormally high maintenance costs associated with piers.

## PROPOSED START TIME

The proposed start time is for work to begin in 2024 and be completed, hopefully, in 2025.

It is hoped that the RNLI will start work on their project in 2024, and that it will be fully operational in 2027.

## THE RNLI

I have been told that the RNLI wish to retain both former lifeboat stations - one to be used as a shop, the other as a museum. They will also need space to site their new operations centre, and this will necessitate the moving of the clock tower.

It is also rumoured that they wish to have use of the western end of the main building on the island. What they need this space for, I know not at this moment in time. However, this could all just be a rumour, as I have seen nothing in writing.

## THE CLOCKTOWER

Over the years, the society has collected funds to repair the clock tower; complete with new faces and a plaque stating that the 'Friends' had provided the funds to do so.

The main objectives of the project are:

## LIFE-SAVING

We must enable the return of the RNLI to Birnbeck Island which will maximise its life-saving role on this busy stretch of coast.

## PUBLIC ACCESS

The project must deliver safe and permanent public access to Birnbeck Pier and Island.

## ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

The project must create new opportunities for residents and visitors to learn about the history of the pier and its role in the development of the town of Weston.

## BUILT AND NATURAL HERITAGE

The project must rescue and repurpose the

However, it is rumoured that one of two things may happen:

1. The new lifeboat station and operations centre may be situated in such a way that the view of the clock tower may be hidden.

2. The clock tower is to be dismantled and sited elsewhere.

I have, on behalf of the society, informed the group that we may not wish to finance the repair of the clock tower due to the added costs that will be incurred should either of these plans be instigated.

With these secretive plans, we seem to be going back to the world of the Cold War!

The support being given to the rare protected marine landscape that surrounds the site is also being treated as top secret.

It is hoped that, with the new ownership and finance now in place, things will now start to move forward and at long last we will be able to produce a newsletter every three months.

I say to you all, my glass is half-full, how is yours?

#### MIKE DAVIES

It is with regret that I must inform you that former Chairman, Mike Davies, passed away on 12 October 2023.

The secretary, David Fry and myself attended his funeral on 2 November and gave the society's condolences to his family.

He will be missed.

**Charles McCann**  
Chairman

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Financial Statement

The secretary presented the accounts:

For the year ending 31 March 2023

##### INCOME

Subscriptions, donations, shop £1923.70

##### EXPENSES

Printing, postage,  
sundry expenses, stock £1111.67  
Expenditure over income for the year £812.03

BANK & CASH, 1 APRIL 2022 £70,394.57

BANK & CASH, 31 MARCH 2023 £71,746.23

##### FINANCED BY

Bank and cash £71,716.23  
Stock £30.00  
TOTAL £71,746.23

Proposed: D Fry

Seconded: K Peacock

Carried.

\*\*\*\*\*

The floor was asked if the society could do a reprint of Stan's book because all copies had now been sold.

Proposed: J Thomas

Seconded: L Langford

Carried.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Membership Secretary's Report

What a year it has been for the pier! The news

we had all been waiting for over many years finally came, and we are now moving into a new phase of developments - at last! It's so rewarding, particularly for those who have been members for many years, that our patience has paid off, and I know we are all feeling a new sense of optimism.

I am sorry to say that this is my last AGM as membership secretary. Owing to a number of other commitments, I no longer have sufficient time to devote to the role, so I am standing down from the committee as of today. I must just add what a pleasure and a privilege it has been, and how very impressed I have been by the stalwart loyalty and support shown by so many members year on year.

I am delighted to announce that a new volunteer has come forward to step into the role of membership secretary from next week, whose name is Angie Humphries. You will all be hearing from her in the coming months, I'm sure, and I know you will give her a warm welcome.

Turning to the funds raised through membership subscriptions, this year's total is £2130. As always, I know that doesn't tell the whole story, as many members give in other ways, perhaps through volunteering or helping with spreading the word about the society by distributing leaflets. We value the support of each and every member - THANKYOU!

**Rebecca Snell**  
Membership Secretary

\*\*\*\*\*

The floor was asked to approve Angie Humphries becoming the society's new membership secretary.

Proposed: T Morley

Seconded: C Coupland  
Carried.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### General discussion

An email from member John McSweeney was read out:

*Unfortunately, I have a family event on the weekend of the AGM so can't attend which is a great pity as I wanted to press the group to move its focus to saving the north leg. It will be a terrible loss if this gets demolished. Retaining it would complete the circle and also keep the door open for future ferry business. I see this is being looked at the Swansea-Ilfracombe end of the Bristol Channel.*

Most people would like to see the boats back, and PierView, re-opened as soon as possible.

It was discussed, with NSC now being the freeholders of the pier, whether they would lease to interested parties.

The RNLI do not intend to restore the north jetty - something for us to think about.

We are hoping that the BRT will be the partner of choice to run the landside part of the development.

Raffle.

Meeting closed 3pm.

\*\*\*\*\*

After the meeting, Lesley took a group of members to see the new information hub, next to PierView, and where they purchased a selection of Birnbeck Pier souvenirs.

## A Word from the Membership Secretary...

**H**ello, my name is Angie Humphries and I'm pleased to be given the opportunity to take on the role of membership secretary for a society involved in the saving and restoration of such an important pier to many.

I don't live locally to Weston-super-Mare, but from the first time I set eyes on the Old Pier,

whilst holidaying nearby, I totally fell in love with it. I spent hours just looking at it and wondering why it was in such bad condition. I found this society shortly afterwards whilst searching the internet for answers.

Immediately, I became a member and when I saw the position of membership secretary was to become vacant I just had to apply.

Like all of you, I will do whatever it takes to help raise awareness of the need to get the pier restored and back in use, so I'm more than happy to volunteer my time to the cause.

**T**hank you to everyone who has continued to support us through membership subscriptions, and thank you to the new members who've joined within the last few months too. We are delighted to have your support and overwhelmed with your kind words and donations.

As you may all be aware, a planning application for the restoration of the pier was submitted in April this year by the new owners, North Somerset Council. We are eagerly awaiting the outcome of that application so work can begin. Funding is in place. This is indeed exciting times for the future of the Old Pier.

\*\*\*\*\*

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome these new members who have joined since the beginning of this year:

Terry Bridgwood	Templecombe
Richard Ashley	Derby
Kathleen Howarth	Bristol
Chris Easthope	Denbighshire
Nicholas Hubbard-Baites	Worcester
David Fry	Weston-super-Mare
Derek Moyes	Weston-super-Mare
Abigail Goodwin	Harwich
Graham England	Weston-super-Mare
Sandy Dixon	Bristol
Susan Treffa	Cardiff
Christopher Lee	Southport
Caroline Bird	Bristol
Richard Stones	London
Beth Charley	Cheshunt

## CONDOLENCES

We are all very sorry to hear of the passing of Pamela Vowles from Weston. She'd been a member since 2009. We send our condolences to her family and friends.

## DONATIONS

We would like to give thanks to these amazing members who made donations with their subscriptions recently:

Derek Moyes	Weston-super-Mare
Shirley Baxter	Weston-super-Mare
Pamela Bomford	Harmston
Janet & Alan Cattell	Exeter
Nigel Coombes	Portishead
Roger Cotterell	Nuneaton
Freda Davies	Langport
Chris & Jean Davies	Weston-super-Mare
Roy Durston	Axbridge
Richard Ellis	Cheddar
Mr & MD Ellison	Sutton Coldfield
David Harris	Newport
Rev. Steven Hartree	Bleadon
Wendy Lovegrove	Wells
Mick & Annette Lowe	Coventry
Andrew Morgan	Poole
Adrian & Helle Mugridge	Weston-super-Mare
Barbara Oldham	Cheadle Hulme
Joan Rendell	Weston-super-Mare
John & Ruth Savery	London
Keith Shaw	Malvern
Janet Stephen	Weston-super-Mare
Graham Taylor	Swanage
Dorothy Taylor	Birmingham
Paul Turner	Swindon
A Weaver	Berkeley Alford
David & Eileen Johnston	Kent

## COMMENTS

Here are a few of the lovely comments members have made since I've joined the team:

"Our very best wishes to everyone. Hoping 2024 will be a brighter one for the Old Pier."  
David Harris, Newport.

"So looking forward to seeing the start of reconstruction now that the ownership of the pier has been settled. Well done to all those that have worked so hard."  
Graham Taylor, Swanage.

"Keep up the good work."  
David Milner, Oxted.

"Congratulations on all you do for the Grand Old Lady of Birnbeck."  
Rev. Steven Hartree, Bleadon.

"Hoping for all good things in 2024 for the pier."  
Roger Cotterell, Nuneaton.

"Keep up the wonderful work and campaign."  
Mr & MD Ellison, Sutton Coldfield.

\*\*\*\*\*

Once again, thank you all for being part of a great society. Your continued support means a lot to the team. We can't thank you enough.

**Angie Humphries**, Membership Secretary

## DIGITAL NEWSLETTER

If you would prefer to receive your newsletter via email - thus saving the society ever-increasing printing and postage costs (and a few trees!) - please email the editor at [gavin@thebrandmill.net](mailto:gavin@thebrandmill.net) and he will arrange for a PDF version of the newsletter to be sent to you instead. You also get to see the newsletter a little while before everyone else!

## POSTCARDS FROM THE PIER

We continue our look at the collection of postcards, photographs and other printed items kindly donated to us by Nigel Coombes, with, once again, the editor attempting to add some sort of commentary to them!



PADDLE  
STEAMER  
BAR  
AT  
BIRNBECK  
ISLAND

C6404

**T**his issue's collection starts with an unused colour postcard with the large title 'Paddle Steamer Bar at Birnbeck Island'.

It shows people, dressed for an evening out, enjoying a drink, or two, in the island's Paddle Steamer Bar. A woman in a royal blue and white dress, and brown shoes, is tentatively approaching the bar.

Nigel notes that it's from the 1950s and during the John Critchley era of ownership. However, without being any sort of fashion expert, as anyone who has met me will testify, I would guess that it's from the early 1970s (looking at the mustachioed gentleman facing away from the bar; the trousers on his blue-grey suit have a definite flare from the knee). Equally, if it is indeed from the Critchley era, then it must be from at least 1972.



P.S. "BRISTOL QUEEN"

P. &amp; A. CAMPBELL, LTD.

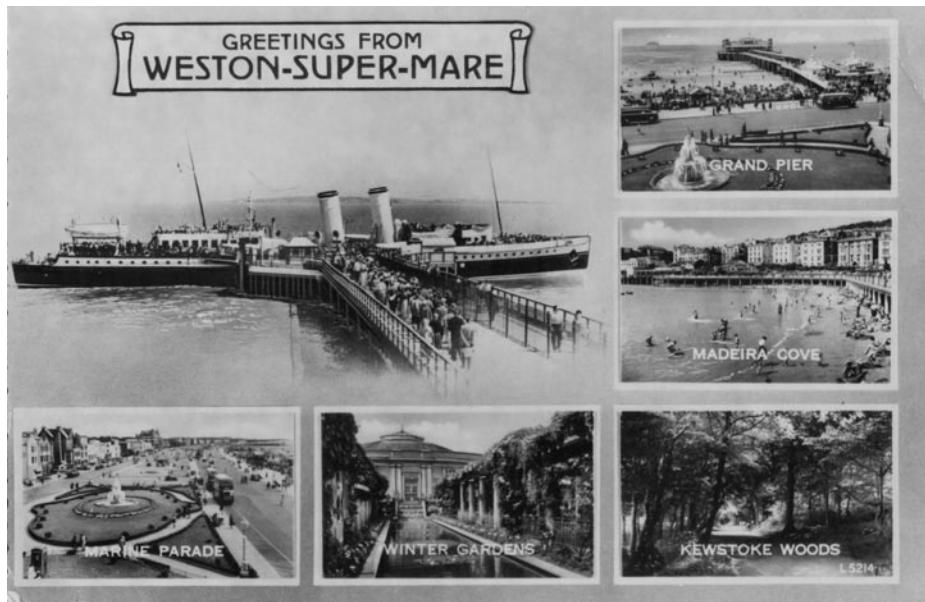
Secondly, we have a more modern-looking postcard, although it's probably from a very similar year to the one depicting the Paddle Steamer Bar.

Like most postcards of the era, and of the ones that I can remember as a child, it features lush green grass, a bright blue sky and, somewhat implausibly for Weston, deep blue sea. Neat rows of flowers add further colour.

Seven people are enjoying the view, although the person on the extreme left, wearing a crimson anorak, is cruelly cut in half.

It's wavy-edged, unused, entitled 'The Old Pier, Weston-super-Mare' and was published by Bamforth & Company of Holmfirth, Yorkshire.

Next up is another unused, black-and-white, postcard showing PS Bristol Queen, which, Nigel



notes, was the last of P & A Campbell's 'White Funnel' steamers.

Published by Raphael Tuck & Sons Limited, the reverse is quite an ostentatious affair, with a royal warrant, company logo with the tagline 'the world's art service', and the caption 'Carte Postale'.

This is an unusual use of French for a company that, research shows, was formed in London in 1870 by Prussian refugees, with much of their output being for the German market. The company went into decline after much of their archive was lost when their headquarters were destroyed during the Blitz.

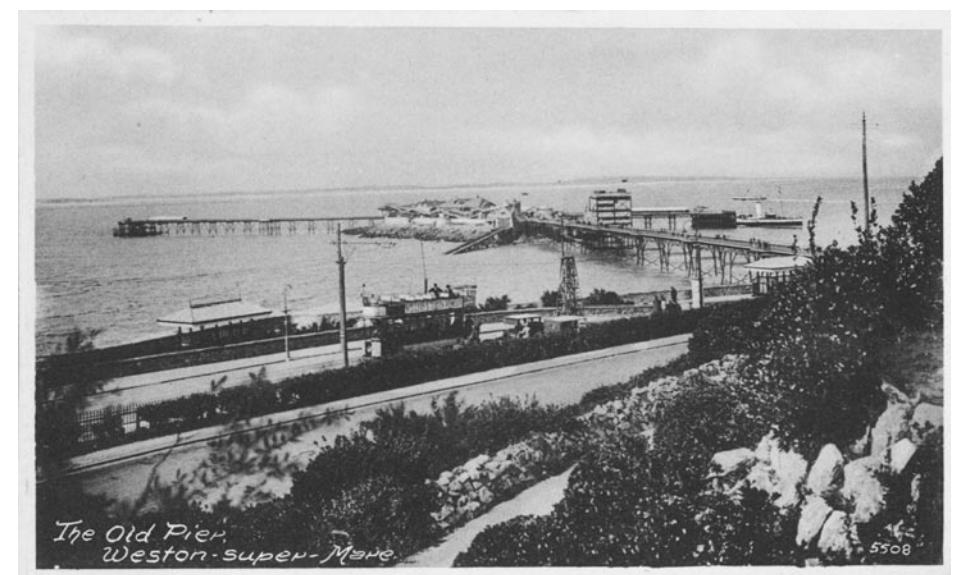
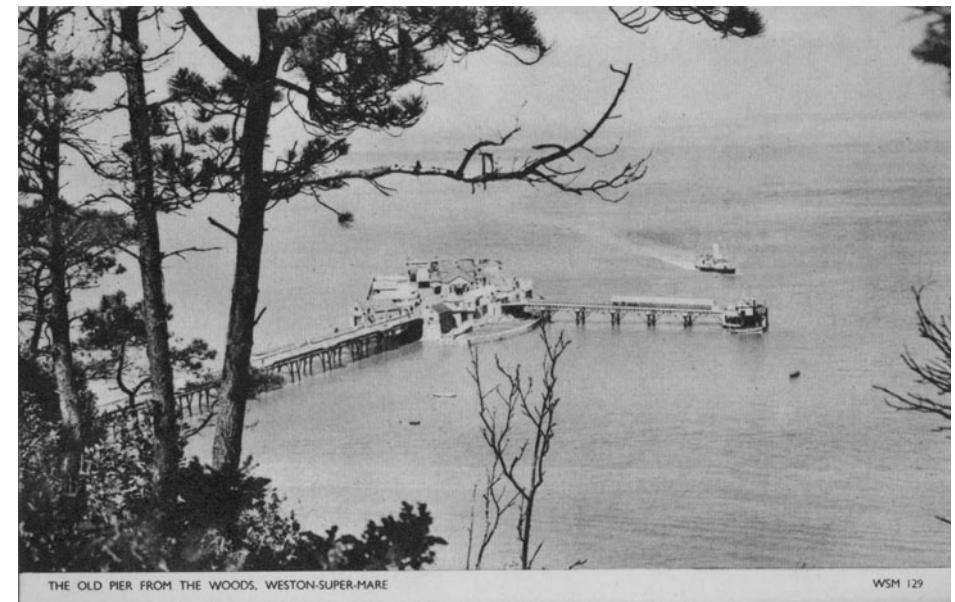
The above black-and-white postcard (although it has a slight sepia patina), entitled 'Greetings from Weston-super-Mare', is a multi-view offering showing six views of Weston in its heyday: a steamer at Birnbeck's north jetty (which we have seen here before), Marine Parade, the Winter Gardens, Kewstoke Woods, Madeira Cove, and the town's 'other pier'.

It's the first 'used' postcard in this issue, but unfortunately the postmark is hard to read in places; definitely 10.30am, probably 12 August, and, I'm guessing from the sections of numbers that did print successfully, 1965 - although the card looks much older. Its red 2½d stamp was issued between 1952 and 1967 - so 1965 may well be correct.

The message, to a Mrs. Howe in Upton-St. Leonards, Gloucester, reads:

*"Weather fine during day but still cool and breezy. Walt and Wendy gone to Knightstone Theatre tonight to see show. Children enjoying sand and sea. Went to Bristol Zoo this afternoon. Hope to be in Upton by teatime, Saturday. Walt says tell Evelyn to wait for us. Love, Pearl."*

At the top of the opposite page is an unused, and quite poor quality, sepia card entitled 'The Old Pier from the Woods, Weston-super-Mare', with a steamer approaching, and all nicely framed by the trees.



It's from Norwich publisher Jarrold & Sons' Chrome Series, and, like another one of theirs which we have yet to feature, is quite flimsy, and with a photo that lacks definition - almost looking like a sketch.

Below it is a delightful unused sepia card entitled 'The Old Pier, Weston-super-Mare', with no publisher details, but showing the pier in very fine fettle - with steamer, south jetty, and tram (more about trams in the next issue!).



Next up, on this page, we have two photographic prints taken many years apart.

The first one, top, is sepia-coloured and mounted onto a stiff cardboard. It shows a very busy pier, with steamer just leaving and another approaching, a number of deckchairs and onlookers along the sea wall, and a couple of neat rows of typically dark-coloured cars. I would guess, from their style, that they, and therefore the photo, is immediately pre-war.

For the smaller image on this page, Nigel's notes state: 'PS Waverley makes her first call at Knightstone, Weston, 26 May 1993. The facilities are very restricted but both steamers like to keep a token presence at the resort.'

Amongst the heavy coats on a miserable-looking day is what looks to be a Lancia promotional umbrella. The Italian manufacturer stopped selling cars in the UK in 1994.



At the top of the opposite page is an unused Valentine's Series sepia postcard, printed on uncoated card, entitled 'Birnbeck Pier, Weston-Super-Mare' (with an incorrect upper-case 's!').

It is unusual amongst these cards to see the pier referred to as Birnbeck, presumably because the image pre-dates the opening of the Grand Pier in 1904, when the term 'Old Pier' was more commonly adopted.



Finally, we have a lovely sepia card entitled 'Boating Slip & Old Pier, Weston-super-Mare', showing families enjoying an afternoon in the water, blissfully unaware of the horrors of World War I that lay ahead.

Posted 27 July 1912, using a wonkily affixed green halfpenny stamp, to a Miss Young in Ilton, Somerset, just 35 miles away, the pencil-written message reads:

Dear Annie. I shall not to be able to come out as I do not return from Weston until Monday. Fondest love from Janie.

Sadly, it's the sort of message that would be sent via text today!

**Gavin Troth**

# PLEASE

Please help the society to grow by encouraging people to join. Members receive regular newsletters as well as a chance to get more involved in the campaign if they so wish.

## Annual Membership

Adult £10.00 / Family £15.00 / Senior Citizen £7.50 / Student £5.00 / Business £25.00

Name	
Address	
Telephone	Email
I would like to make an (optional) additional donation of	
<input type="checkbox"/> I require a receipt (please tick)	
<input type="checkbox"/> I would prefer to receive my newsletters via email (please tick)	

Please send completed forms (photocopies accepted) to:  
Angela-Jane Humphries, Suite 121, St. Loyes House, 20 St. Loyes Street, Bedford, MK40 1ZL  
Please make cheques payable to 'Friends of the Old Pier Society'.

# THANK YOU

The Editor would like to thank the following for their contributions to this issue:  
Charles McCann, North Somerset Council, Lesley McCann, Mike Pitt, Martin Meredith,  
Richard Stenlake, Angie Humphries, and Nigel Coombes.

Contributions - anything Birnbeck-related - are welcomed for future issues. Please send to the Editor whose details are on page two.

Cover photograph: Mike Pitt.