

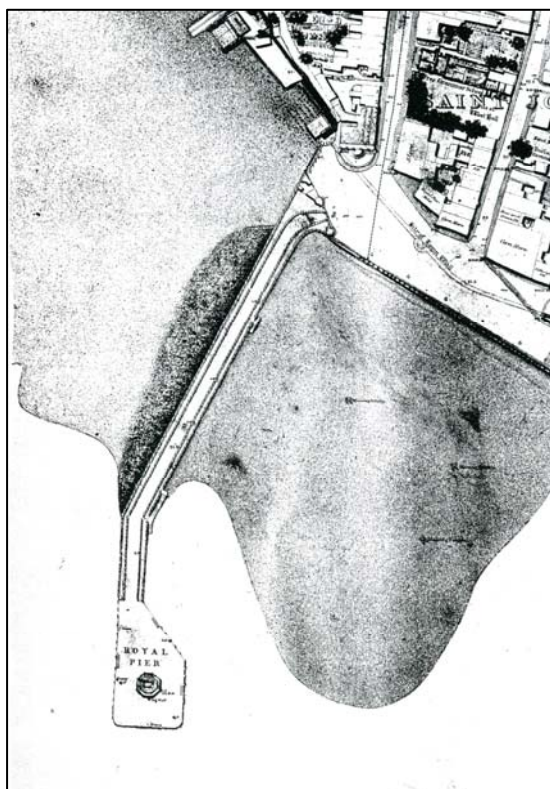
Jeff Pain

Southampton Pier

Although Southampton's Pier was built to service passengers and freight it developed into a Seaside style pier, catering for promenaders, providing refreshments, band stand, tourist excursion boats, and a pavilion for dances, concerts and meetings, even including "what the butler saw" machines, though strangely it was not included in certain listings of UK piers, presumably because it was on a river estuary and not facing the open sea. I personally recall in my late teens attending dances, usually on Saturday nights hosted by Gil Hume and his Band, and also some jazz concerts. This is my tribute to a waterfront feature used and loved by many over the years.

The Beginning

Southampton has for some 2 millenniums at least been a port for import and export of goods, with the dock area moving from along the banks of the river Itchen to around the new walled town by about the end of the first millennium. In 1680 two quays were described. The South Quay at the Watergate is some



223 feet in length, 190 feet breadth at the gate and 63 feet at its head, the other older one at West Quay is 225 feet long and some 58 feet in breadth at the wall narrowing to 37 feet at the end.

By the start of the 19th century the West Quay was disused and the South Quay now the Town Quay, had been extended several times by at least 180 feet. At this time passenger traffic was increasing, with services along the coast, and cross channel offering connections to Paris via the Seine. ⁽¹⁾

Figure1. Detail from the 1845 OS map. Note the pier head has straight edges, not round as most contemporary illustrations imply. Also the road ends at the pier entrance, the extension to Western Esplanade was not made until the 1890s.

Although Town Quay could offer berths at high tide it was very limited being a working environment with restricted space, so passengers were normally ferried ashore in small boats, which was to say the least lacking in comfort and convenience.

In 1824 a group of steamship proprietors proposed a chain pier, and obtained a lease from the corporation of land apparently near the platform (east of Town Quay) with a breadth of 30 feet to the low water mark and 60 feet wide at the head, however lack of finance led to the failure of this scheme. In

1828 a private syndicate made an offer to the Harbour Board Commissioners ⁽²⁾ of a £7000 loan to construct a pier, the catch being they required 10% interest per annum for 21 years, suggesting this could be raised by



Figure 2. Mid 1800s view showing much activity around the Town Quay and passenger traffic using the pier.

tolls, after this period they would hand the property over on repayment of the principal.



Figure 3. One side of a stereo pair of the Gateway with (in)animation

Although the HBC were prepared to consider this proposal, a group of local business men, which included three of the Le Feuvres, William Lankester and others suggested this should be handled in house. They proposed construction of a pier using the breakwater facing the Custom House with the area enclosed to be a repair basin. This scheme the HBC rejected owing to lack of funds for such an elaborate project. However the continued pressure for some action eventually bore fruit, so in 1829 the HBC proposed erection of a

pier over the existing breakwater providing the Borough Council and the committee would help it to obtain an Act of Parliament to cover the work and raising the necessary capital. This was agreed and in accordance with plans submitted by Mr. Doswell an act was passed under



Figure 4. From the early 1870s. Trains have arrived but horse-drawn along a single line with a basic platform.

1 and 2 Will 1v cap 1 (1831) with authorised capital of £10,000 which also created a body known as the Pier and Harbour Commission (basically identical with the existing HBC) to oversee operations. Mr Doswell's plans offered either a stone built structure estimated at £14,000, or a wooden option at £7,500, the second being chosen, although the act allowed for some latitude, which was just as well as the final figure was in the region of £15,000.

The official opening by the Duchess of Kent accompanied by her daughter Princess Victoria, was originally requested for 28th June 1833, but this was changed by the Duchess to 8th July 1833. The royal party arrived on the yacht *Emerald* from the I.O.W. where they were staying at Norris Castle, to be greeted by the Mayor, Corporation, Gentry and Merchants, they were then conducted to a marquee at the Pier Head where the Duchess had pleasure in bestowing the name 'Royal Pier' and wishing the enterprise every success in the future.

The Middle

So its life began and very quickly the downside of using timber became apparent, as within 5 years the marine borer Gribble had so infested the piles that replacements were required, and Doswell used the method of scupper nailing for protection on the new timbering, this entails the use of many large headed nails hammered close together to give effectively a sheet of armour which appears to have lasted until the major rebuild in the 1890's



Figure 5. From the 1880s, note the alterations for steam hauled trains; additional track to allow a runround facility, the extra pier structure to provide direct access, and the single storey entrance building.

Commercial traffic was attracted by the new facilities with passengers at the pier and cargo at the town quay, both under harbour board management. But the development of the docks by a separate company ⁽³⁾ which opened in

1842 with the attraction of rail connection took virtually all the deep sea cargo and passenger traffic away, though traffic to the I.O.W. and passenger excursion services remained. This situation remained fairly constant during the rest of its life, though there were some disputes over rates and for a short while in 1862 the passenger service joined a recently formed competitor on the I.O.W. service in using a pontoon on the River Itchen, which was moored close by the Floating Bridge terminal, however though cheaper, as it was inconvenient for passengers the vessels soon returned to the pier, and in 1865 they purchased the competition as their facilities at Cowes were much better.

In 1847 the town quay was connected by a tramway to the Terminus Station, and in order to avoid the Dock Companies premises it was laid along Canute Road and the Platform. To save space in negotiating corners they used turntables (large enough for one wagon at a time) at either end, the motive



Figure 6. An 1880s view clearly showing the separate structure for the railway line and some of the entrance building.

power being horses at H.B. expense. In 1851 it was leased to the LSWR who took over the operation. In 1870 it was agreed to an angled connection across Canute Road to facilitate direct services to the Town Quay and Royal Pier. To access the pier this required an additional structure on the eastern side of the existing pier to accommodate the railway line, on the pier it had a single platform, though a loop was provided. About this time a pontoon was installed for the regular I.O.W. service. The rail connection was formally opened on

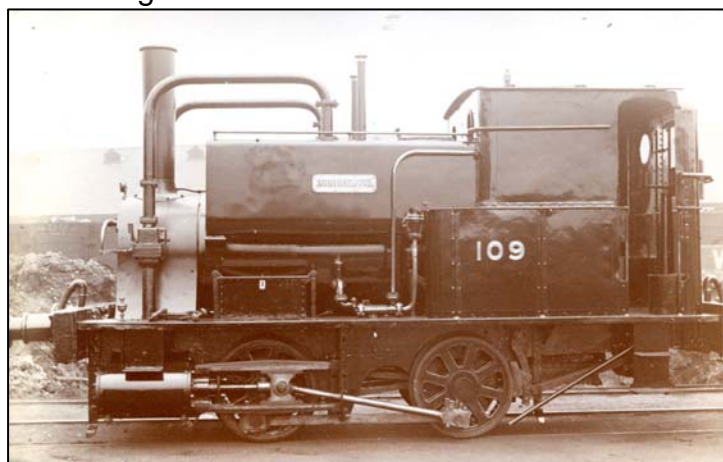


Figure 7. Locomotive *Southampton* taken into LSWR stock in 1898 and numbered 109. It spent some time in Bournemouth until withdrawn in 1913. Sold in 1915 to Kynoch Ltd. for use in their munitions factory at Longparish.

25th Sept. 1871 with carriages conveyed from Waterloo on the 05-36 train to Southampton Terminus, in regular service the standard formation to the pier was, one 1st class carriage, one 2nd class and a Brake Van for luggage, (all 4 wheeled stock) drawn by three horses.

With traffic from the town quay increasing it was becoming apparent that mechanical traction was needed, and in early 1876 the LSWR applied for permission from the town council to use steam engines, this was given initially for one year with the following conditions (which were presumably satisfactorily observed as operation continued).

- a. Speed to be limited to 5 mph.
- b. A man to be provided with a red flag and bell where the public highway is crossed.
- c. Engines similar to those used in the docks, with powerful brakes, and also that the exhaust must be discharged into the water tanks and not the atmosphere whilst on the public road.
- d. Maximum weight of locomotive was not to exceed that of a loaded truck i.e 13 tons.

So the LSWR ordered from Shanks & Sons of Arbroath at a cost of £995 an 0-4-0 tank engine named 'Southampton', this entered service on 21st of September 1876 and was successful . A second locomotive named 'Cowes' followed within a year from the same builder. Also a second hand engine was acquired which retained the name 'Ritzbuttel' which it had been given whilst working in Germany. These three locomotives worked the lines exclusively until 1898, by which time the LSWR had purchased the Docks and began using some of their own locomotives through to the Town Quay and Royal Pier.

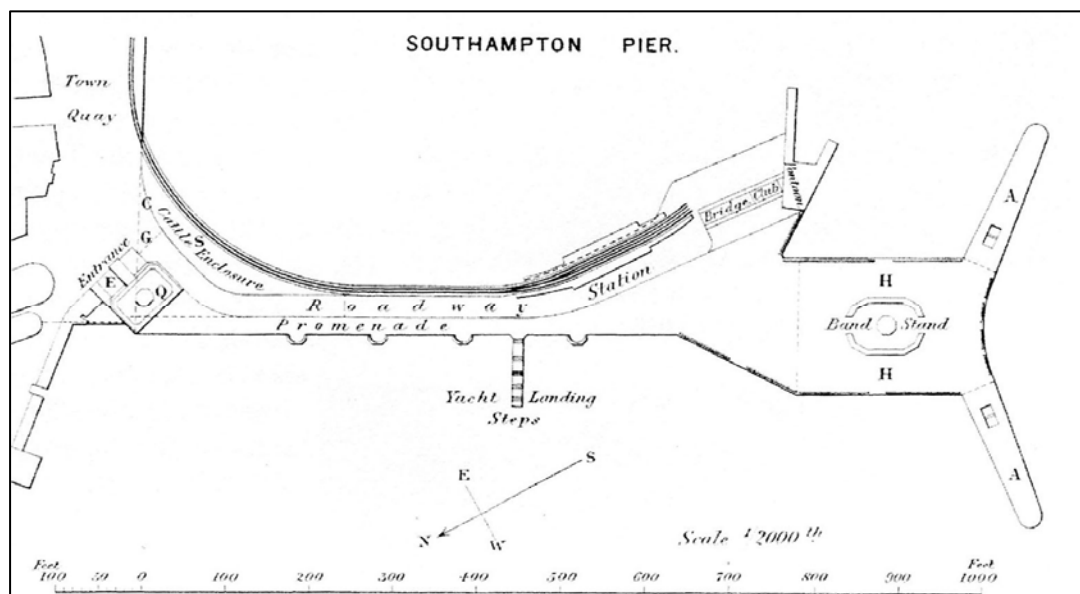


Figure 8. Plan of the 1892 reconstruction which indicates the initial use of the old pontoon. Apart from the bandstand and the platform awning there are no other structures as I assume the 'Bridge Club' is the flexible connection to the pontoon.

Various acts of Parliament in 1863, 1877 and 1882 had covered improvements to the Royal Pier and Town Quay however proposals to drastically rebuild the pier were approved under 54 & 55 Vic 1891 Ch XCV. These went ahead, with the new structure being opened by the Duke of Connaught on 2nd June 1892 as shown on fig.2.



Figure 9. Early 1900s view as the refreshment rooms are visible behind the bandstand. Note the liberal use of the town crest on the ironwork and bandstand. Some of the railings remained until the end, but by then the paintwork was overall grey. Some photographers were not above adding figures and I do wonder about the two in the foreground!

Items of interest are a new gatehouse, while the general line of the old pier is shown by the roadway, the cattle enclosure was created by in filling on the eastern side between Railway and Roadway to the point where they met, the original small pontoon was retained, on the new section was a Bandstand with a surrounding shelter where later a pavilion would be erected. The railway station now had two platforms both with awnings, at the same time electric lighting replaced gas over the whole pier. The pontoon was for commercial traffic allowing goods, cattle and sheep to be landed and driven into town, the enclosure being intended for livestock awaiting shipment, though in the many



Figure 10. Railway station and steamer booking office c1902

postcard views I have seen it is always empty.

A detailed description of constructional details may be found in a paper to the Institute of Mechanical Engineers at Portsmouth in July 1892, given by James Lemon the then Mayor of Southampton, but a few extracts follow:



Figure 11. Townside of the 1892 entrance. A post 1911 view as the tram tracks have arrived

“The fabric is on cast iron screw piles 8 inches dia 1 inch thick, except for the promenade the dia is 7 inches with thickness of $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, the average length was 40 feet to give some 5 feet in solid ground after passing through the mud. This bracing was of two

kinds, horizontal and vertical diagonal only topped by main girders with traverse girders supporting the wooden decking. The pier arms had landings at two levels under the main deck to allow for low and very low tides. At all landing places the main fabric was protected by wooden piles braced independently so to protect the iron structure during every day use.

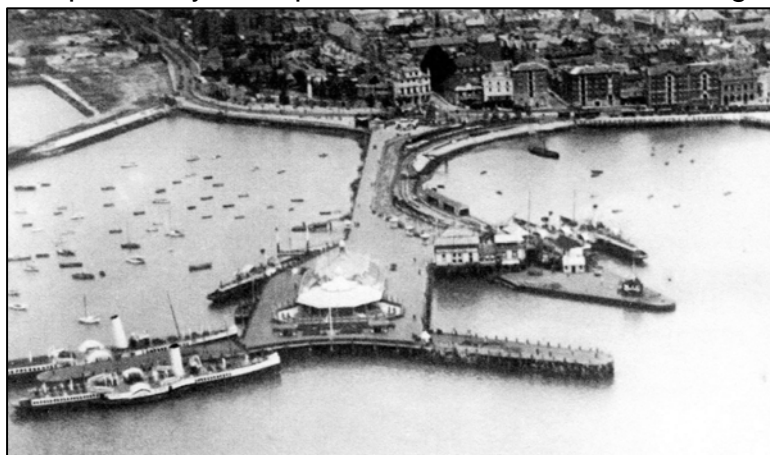


Figure 12. Aerial view c1920. Note the extension to the pavilion for what is probably a roller skating rink, and, at the left of the picture, part of the WW1 wartime train ferry pier

The carriageway used steel trough decking levelled with concrete and surfaced with gravel, in all some 1600 tons of metalwork were used and the total cost was £40,000. The engineers were Mr. James Lemon & Mr. E. Cooper, the

contractor Mr. Henry I. Saunders, electrical engineering design was by Mr. J.G.W. Aldridge and work by Mr. F. Shalders”.

The next few years saw several improvements, a larger pontoon was installed, a toilet and a store block was added on the east side close to the pontoon, in 1910 the bandstand was moved southwards and a pavilion erected in its place, tea rooms were built to the west of the pontoon and in 1910 the town tramway system finally arrived at the pier entrance from Holy Rood.

The First World War had one major influence in that the rail connection became disused, some sources suggesting the service was suspended on or shortly after the out break of war, however some when the track was severed



just to the north of the platforms, possibly through damage by an errant vessel though a date has not been found. It should be mentioned that the original engines were displaced after the LSWR bought the dock company and locomotives from the dock fleet were used

Figure 13. Mid 1920s. Note the gazebo at the bottom of the picture. A section of railway track is missing and one of the platforms has been removed,

(without condensing apparatus), also latterly some of the LSWR steam rail motors were used to give a connection from the Terminus Station instead of through coaches from Waterloo.

Otherwise things returned to normal until the late 1920's when in association with work on the New Docks, land reclamation both between the pier and town quay and to the west (Mayflower Park) took place, which enabled the road past the pier to be widened and a new entrance was constructed some 175 feet southwards on what was now solid land, all remnants of the railway on the pier had now been removed and the area used for parking as cars were now being carried on the IOW service.



Figure 14. Mid 1920s promenaders enjoying the sun, a view which could have been Bournemouth or Brighton.

The End

In 1939 came war again and only the ferry traffic remained, the pavilion becoming naval offices for the duration. In the air raids a parachute mine landed on the north corner of the pier head creating a hole which was not repaired until after the war. Peace came, but the level of excursion traffic did not, firstly several of the paddle steamers requisitioned for the duration were



returned past renovation, and although stop gap vessels were used for a while the introduction of an ex LCT (landing craft tank) in 1947 to carry cars indicated the future. Although the 'Balmoral' (2) built 1949 was a traditional diesel screw type vessel, the next new

Figure 15. 26th November 1929. On a typical dull November day, the old entrance is still in use, though its replacement is nearly completed. Note the difference in location.

build in 1959 was a dedicated car carrier handled at a new pontoon between the pier and town quay in a area which had been used during the war to load LCT vessels by a ramp. With the sale of 'Balmoral' (2) in 1969 the pier lost its regular traffic though occasional calling vessels still berthed in the summer months.



Figure 16. In the 1950s the German liner *Bremen* passes en route to the New Docks. Note the reclaimed land that will become Mayflower Park, also the railway track across the entrance which was the connection between the Old and New Docks.

Back to the pier, in 1947 the Harbour Board requested the Town Council to take the pier over but this was rejected. In 1949 fees for the Red Funnel were raised, the ferry company protested, and in its evidence stated that during 1948 the *Medina* had made 631 voyages. Over the years the pavilion had



Figure 17. In the early 1950s, note the surfaced area for dancing in front of the pavilion.

many alterations, including at the north an extended entrance, also minor changes engulfed most of the bandstand, and in 1963 operation of the building was leased to the Mecca organisation for a few years.

After the War various items were displayed in a shelter attached to the entrance

including, the Supermarine S-6 racing seaplane (now in Solent Sky Museum), an optical system from the Eddystone Lighthouse and some large stones dredged from the river.



Figure 18. In service with Red Funnel from 1947-1962, *Norris Castle* unloads cars at the pontoon.

In 1968 ownership of the pier and town quay along with navigational responsibilities passed to the Dock Board and closure came on January 2nd 1980. So the pier slowly deteriorated until 1987 saw a fire which damaged the pavilion followed on 30th July 1992 by a more serious fire which finished off the

pavilion and tea rooms along with some of the decking.

What remains today, the road section has been used for material storage and car/lorry parking associated with the I.O.W. car ferries which have reclaimed more land over the years. The one thing remaining intact is the entrance building, surviving demolition proposals in 1980. It has at odd times been a restaurant, a night club and currently an Indian restaurant though with some structural alterations at the rear, its future seems assured for the moment.

Regarding the pier itself, this would appear to be beyond recovery, though plans are a foot to redevelop the area which will remove the terrible eye sore that this once grand structure has been allowed to become.



Figure 19. The pier is by-passed by cars though passengers still board via the pier circa 1965. It will not be long before new facilities remove all trade from the pier.

NOTES

1) The Ferries, there is recognisable continuous line through amalgamations and name changes since 1820 to the present operator Red Funnel Ltd. At one time they laid claim to the longest title, being known as the “Southampton, Isle of Wight and South of England Royal Mail Steam Packet Company Limited”.

2) The Dock Company, this originated as a private company, was bought by the London and South Western Railway Company (L.S.W.R.), becoming part of the Southern Railway, on nationalization it became part the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive, then the British Transport Docks Board now privatised it is part of Associated British Ports, though now under foreign ownership.

3) The Harbour Board (HB). Was a body set up by Southampton Council in 1803 to collect tolls from shipping, to manage the safe passage of vessels inside of Calshot and to operate the Town Wharf. The Board comprised commissioners who were appointed by the Town and Shipping interests. Later they absorbed the Board set up to manage the Royal Pier, but this was not a major step as several commissioners held office on both Boards.

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