

HASTINGS PIER CHARITY

HASTINGS
PIER

An Overview of Victorian and Edwardian Society



Hastings during the Victorian era, (HPC041.006)



Supported by

The National Lottery®
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



www.hastingspier.org.uk

An Overview of Victorian and Edwardian Society

The major and relevant Acts of Parliament that contributed to the changes in society at that time were, The Great Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, 1872, 1885. The Public Health Act 1875, The Factories Act 1844 and the Bank Holiday Act of 1871.

The emphasis was on improving living and working conditions for all by restricting the number of hours that workers were allowed to work and improving conditions generally.

The political spectrum was also changing with more people being allowed to vote and the beginning of the suffragette movement. The Working Classes were able to afford newspapers due to the abolition of the stamp duty on them, making them more accessible for the working classes and thereby becoming a means for them to learn about politics and other news items. Newspapers were sent by train to cities and towns that had railway connections therefore national news became available in addition to the local news.



A group outing to Hastings Pier from St. Matthew's Church, Silverhill. (HPC041.027)

The Industrial Revolution meant there were many changes during Victoria's reign as a result of manufacturing technologies becoming widespread and more efficient, leading to a more prosperous society with a greater amount of leisure time at their disposal. Machines were built to take over the work of many industries, which meant that more products could be manufactured for a lower price and less manpower.

Middle class reformers assisted Working Classes to aspire to better things. Families became more prosperous, as many new businesses grew and employed more people, the country became a world leader. Some employers became aware of the poor conditions their workers endured and provided welfare services, housing and schools for the children. An example of one such employer was Cadbury who built the workers village in Bourneville in 1879.

The Bank Holiday Act in 1871 gave workers 4 official days holiday a year and it became fashionable to travel by train to the seaside. Often the villages were quiet fishing villages. The Victorians turned many of these into major tourist centres and places where they would "take the waters".

The building of railways from 1830 allowed for the cheaper movement of produce such as crops, fish and building materials and also for people to travel in a cheaper and faster manner. The railways arrived in Hastings in 1840 and thousands of ordinary people could reach the seaside and spend the days enjoying the sea air and entertainments on offer.

The Victorians invented the sea-side holiday, they took to bathing in the sea and invented the bathing machine, this was a beach hut on wheels drawn into the sea by a horse, to allow ladies to discreetly enter the water, having changed into their bathing suits, which covered them from the neck down to their ankles, out of sight of any men. Women were not seen paddling or walking on the beach in their bathing costumes. Men only wore striped one-piece bathing suits after 1850, prior to this they swam naked at designated areas of the beach. Men and women were not allowed to swim within 100 yards of each other until 1903 when mixed bathing was finally allowed.



Photographer George Woods posed his family at the end of the Pier (HPC068.001)

The status of visitors was important, it acted as a recommendation to others to show where was fashionable to stay. The newspapers printed lists of visitor's names and where they were staying in a resort. In Hastings, these were printed in the Hastings and St Leonards Pictorial Advertiser and Visitor List.

The highlight of the day for Victorian holiday makers was the afternoon promenade, dressed in their very best outfits they would come out to see and be seen. Ladies would carry parasols as a protection from the sun and men would wear straw boaters, richly striped blazers and white flannels.

<http://www.fashion-era.com/victorians.htm>

<http://www.timetour.co.uk/summer-holidays-history-victorians/>

www.hastingspier.org.uk

Hastings – A New Resort

The Comprehensive Gazetteer of England and Wales, 1894-5

Hastings gradually declined till, toward the middle of the 18th century, it became a mere fishing village and a retreat of smugglers; but then it was frequented for sea-bathing, and in consequence of its being recommended by Dr Baillie as a resort for his patients it became popular as a watering-place, and thence till now it has steadily increased in that character, attracting visitors, and undergoing extension and improvement. Among the visitors have been the Queen, Duchess of Kent, Prince and Princess of Wales, the Dowager Empress of Germany, and Empress Eugenie, as also the late Prince Imperial of France.

The Watering-Place-Hastings, as a watering-place, holds a rank about midway between Brighton and Margate. Its climate varies greatly in different parts, according to situation and altitude, and therefore renders it, as a retreat for health, suitable to different classes of invalids. The lower parts, from the East Cliff to Pelham Place, have such thorough shelter as to be suited to delicate pulmonary sufferers even in winter and spring; the higher parts have an air more bracing and yet milder than the watering-places in East Kent, and at the same time present facilities for vigorous exercise; and the parts to the west, especially in the choicer spots of St Leonards, combine the advantages of the low and the high. The general death-rate, and the number of deaths from zymotic diseases, are remarkably low. The bathing accommodation, in both the E and the W, is good, and has well-sheltered spots. Recreations of every kind are plentiful. Pleasure steamers make trips along the coast, and across the Channel to France, during the summer months. In-door amusements are as good and various as in other large watering-places; public bands play on the parade; an archery ground and gardens are at St Leonards; a cricket ground is near the Albert Clock Tower; tastefully laid-out walks form a public garden at St Andrews; golf links have been formed on the East Hill; a fine rising ground is on the Fairlight Downs, toward Winchelsea; scope for boating, for fishing, and for other sport is abundant, and numerous enticements to geologists, to antiquaries, and to lovers of the picturesque, are either in the neighbourhood or within short distances. During the hunting season the East Sussex fox-hounds meet within easy distances. Alexandra Park and Gardens, containing an area of 76 acres, are prettily laid out with flowerbeds and trees; the park is also ornamented with miniature lakes, and was opened by the Prince

and Princess of Wales. The archery gardens are to the W of the St Leonards Gardens; the Gensing Gardens are prettily laid out in the centre of St Leonards.

<http://soundbible.com/tags-beach.html>

Pigot & Co Directory 1840

As a watering place Hastings, has long been in high repute, and is rapidly increasing in celebrity. The most excellent accommodations are provided for sea-bathing; the 'Marne Old Warm Baths,' and the 'Pelham Baths,' are of a superior description; and the libraries, hotels and lodging-houses are in every respect worthy of this fashionable town



Trams Next to St Leonards Pier in 1907. (HPC041.094)

Rivalry between Hastings and St Leonards-on-Sea

Hastings had become a mere fishing village and a retreat of smugglers until it became known for its sea-bathing as recommended from 1790 by the physician to King George III, Dr Baillie, who believed that sea-bathing was good for the health. Due to its location and climate it was considered to suit different classes of invalids as there were sheltered areas and more bracing yet mild areas depending on the altitude and the nature of the diseases. The Pigot & Co Directory in 1840 mentions that in Hastings there were excellent accommodations provided for sea-bathing at the Marne Old Warm Baths and the Pelham Baths, the libraries, hotels and lodging houses were worthy of the fashionable town.

www.hastingspier.org.uk

St Leonards-on-Sea was a custom-built sea-side resort started by James Burton in 1826. It was an elegant new town, designed for the well-off including a public garden at the centre, a hotel, an archery centre, assembly rooms and a church. There were separate areas for shops (the Mercatoria) and for laundering (the Lavatoria) and public buildings for entertainment. After his death in 1837 his son Decimus continued with the second phase by buying more land to the west and developing more buildings.

Hastings had also been developing westwards through Pelham Place and more building began, The Eversfield Estate sold off land and the area between Hastings and St Leonards-on-Sea began to fill with properties. In 1875, they merged into the County Borough of Hastings. There came further development of Warrior Square and Upper St Leonards.

Hastings residents were not happy with St Leonards-on-Sea, this was because St Leonards was full of aristocratic visitors and wealthy patrons therefore posing a threat to Hastings as a desirable sea-side resort. Hastings was seen as much less pleasant, particularly the fishing area along the seafront which was messy and full of inhabitants who demonstrated an uninhibited enjoyment of life and an obstinate independence.

The difference between the two towns was marked with St Leonards being seen as the more fashionable, middle and upper-class resort and Hastings as the working class.

<https://nicebrighton.wordpress.com/2011/03/10/the-history-of-st-leonards-on-sea/>

The Piers

www.hastingspier.org.uk

Hastings Pier

The opening of the pier was to be an important development in the history of Hastings as a coastal resort, turning the town into a major attraction for south-east Londoners wanting a good day out beside-the-sea. It was an immediate success, attracting 482,000 people in its first year and 584,000 in the second, much bigger numbers than expected. Especially popular was the band playing every day. Entry to the pier cost 2d, bringing £4,000 income - a sixth of the capital cost - in just 12 months.

Its main role was to provide musical entertainment and theatre in the pavilion at the sea end of the pier. It also supplied space and facilities for promenaders and anglers. Its large expanse of open decking was a parade for many people, especially the better off who liked to be seen in their fashionable clothing. There was a tollgate fee at the entrance that may have deterred the poorest of local people, but Hastings was cheap compared with other piers.

St Leonards Pier

The success of Hastings Pier prompted the construction of a rival promenade and entertainments centre in St Leonards. This was opened in 1891. It had the pavilion at the shore end which allowed carriages to draw right up the door and avoid the occupants getting wet if it was raining. The promenade area was behind the pavilion and a large area was left clear at the sea end for future buildings. The first moving pictures to be shown in Hastings and St Leonards were seen on St Leonards Pier on 7 November 1896.

Steve Peak, author of *A Pier Without a Peer*, *The History of Hastings Pier* and *Peerless Piers* and his website <http://hastingschronicle.net>



St Leonards bathing station, 1890s. (HPC041.010)

Taking the Waters in St Leonards and Hastings

St Leonards Turkish Baths was situated at 8 West Hill Road, opened in 1864. The cost of taking a bath here was five shillings for Ladies only on Tuesdays and Fridays from 8am to 4pm, and 2shillings and sixpence between 4pm and 8pm.

The entrance charge was cheaper for men who could bathe from 12noon until 6pm for three shillings and sixpence. Two other sessions were available, from 8am until noon for two shillings and sixpence and between 6pm and 8pm for one shilling and sixpence. The prices included two towels and a sheet.

In contrast Hastings, White Rock Baths, which opened from 1882, were cheaper to use and had a greater number of baths. The West Hill Road baths had gone into liquidation in 1869 due to the high cost to the public causing it to close.

The cost at White Rock was two shillings and sixpence between 8am and 5pm, and one shilling and ninepence from 5pm until 8pm. These prices were higher than those charged in London and as the cost meant the less well-off were unable to afford to bathe, a session on a Wednesday evening from 8pm and 10pm was introduced for one shilling only.

The importance of the baths for Hastings was highlighted in a memo to the company building the baths due to:

“the absence of any such baths had in many individual instances obliged invalids to leave the town in quest of such Baths, or has prevented their coming to Hastings.” So, it was clearly seen as an important attraction for visitors to the town.

<http://www.victorianturkishbath.org/6DIRECTORY/AtoZEstab/England/StLeon/StLeonEng.htm>

<http://www.victorianturkishbath.org/6DIRECTORY/AtoZEstab/England/HastWhite/HastWhiteEng.htm>

Sea-side attractions

Recreations were plentiful, with gardens to promenade in and listen to the bands in the many bandstands of the day. Along the seafront and on the sands, many entertainments and traditions could be found. Donkey rides and goat cart rides, Punch and Judy shows, ice-cream carts, acrobats, street musicians and pedlars all competed for business.

Beach photographers wheeled their handcarts along the beach and took “instant portraits” using a process known as tintype. These photographs were produced on metal plates so were ideal, it was a cheap and fast process allowing portraits to be sold for as little as sixpence as a souvenir of a day by the sea.

Trips in boats from the beach or from the pier on the larger paddle steamers were enjoyed, taking trips along the coast or a return trip to other sea-side resorts such as Eastbourne.

The West Hill Cliff Funicular railway opened in 1891 and transported people up to Hastings Castle and St Clements Caves. The views from the top over Hastings town and the bracing sea air would have been a reason for visitors to undertake the steep railway ascent.

A second funicular railway at the East Hill was opened in 1903 and took visitors up to the Country Park for walking and taking in the air.

<http://www.visit1066country.com/things-to-do/attractions/cliff-railways-p411571>

www.hastingspier.org.uk

Please note that this information is provided free of charge and whilst Hastings Pier Charity makes every effort to keep the information on the website accurate, the majority of the information comes from the general public and volunteers. We therefore disclaim any warranty or representation, express or implied about its accuracy, completeness or appropriateness for a particular purpose. If there are any errors, please contact Hastings Pier by email info@hpcharity.co.uk

www.hastingspier.org.uk