

HASTINGS PIER CHARITY

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Family Entertainment on Hastings Pier



Ye Merrie Folke on Hastings Pier in 1913 (HPC006.137)



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Family Entertainment on Hastings Pier

When Hastings Pier opened in 1872, it was designed for promenading, with the Pavilion at the sea end as a venue for musical and theatrical entertainment. The success of Hastings Pier as an entertainment venue during the Victorian and Edwardian periods was due to the popular and successful Entertainment Manager, J. D. Hunter (1879-1909). Hunter began his career on the music hall stage and was responsible for bringing major international performers to the Pier.



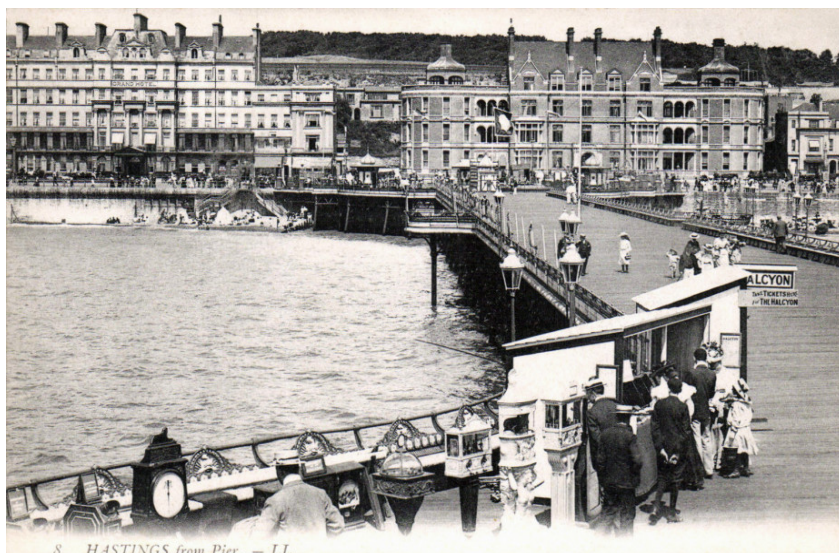
Hunter was famous for his winter **pantomimes**, which referenced local people and goings-on, and often performed in the pantomimes himself.

Dick Whittington on Hastings Pier (HPC006.143)



To entertain children, during the Victorian era **goat carriage rides** were available, not on the Pier itself but at its entrance.

A Goat Carriage at the entrance to Hastings Pier (HPC006.009)



A small **camera obscura** was installed on the pier in 1875 and remained there until c.1904. A second camera obscura was erected in 1928/9. Another early addition to the sea-end of the Pier was slot machines.

Edwardian postcard of slot machines on the Pier (HPC014.029)

Magic Lantern Shows, Panoramas, and Early Film

The Pier was so central to Hastings that “the first exhibition of the electric light took place in the Pier Pavilion”. Showmen used the availability of electricity and the popularity of photography to produce spectacular entertainments, many of which visited Hastings Pier.

Poole’s Myriorama was a spectacular entertainment where stories were told with “unique Mechanical and Electric Effects ... special music and story described in a thrilling manner”. Cut-out figures moved across scrolling paint and cloth panoramas, accompanied by music, lighting, and sound effects. The narrator, often one of the Poole brothers in evening dress, would describe and interpret. By 1900 they had seven separate shows touring for 40 weeks of the year.



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West's "Our Navy" and "Our Army" were a mixture of film, magic lantern slides, sound effects, musical accompaniment, narration, and jingoistic songs, sung with great patriotic fervour. West advertised performances in a number of ways, including the use of a large model naval ship which was towed around the vicinity of the halls where the shows were performed.



George Albert Smith (4 January 1864 – 17 May 1959) was a stage hypnotist, psychic, magic lantern lecturer, Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, inventor, and a key member of the loose association of early British film pioneers.

In the years 1911-1914, films were shown on the Pier in the Hastings Pier Cinema Theatre. Famous shows, which toured nationally, were booked at least once on the Pier before 1914.

G. A. Smith's Animated Pictures

The Hastings and St Leonards Observer for 9 November 1896 reported that "animated photographs" were presented successfully on Hastings Pier by GA Smith, an important film pioneer from Brighton. His shows were advertised as "pictorial and dioramic

The Joy Wheel, 1910–1914

At the end of the Edwardian era the Pier underwent a transformation with the addition of a **shooting gallery**, a **bowling alley**, and the **Joy Wheel**, a novel attraction that had one million customers at the Brussels International Exhibition in 1910. Although for the prurient this was a chance to look up Edwardian ladies' skirts, it was in essence a large, mechanized children's roundabout. Participants sat on the polished wooden circular platform and tried to hang on as it rotated at increasing



speed. Centrifugal force, and intermittent braking, spun people off the platform – much to the amusement of onlookers. Women joined in, a sign of the changing times.

The Joy Wheel 1910-1914 (HPC006.045)

Pierrot troupes

In 1891, the singer and banjoist Clifford Essex returned from France enamoured of the Pierrots he had seen there and resolved to create a troupe of English Pierrot entertainers. Thus were born the seaside Pierrots, in conical hats and sometimes black or coloured costume, who



sang, danced, juggled, and joked on piers around the British coast. Pierrots were sing-along family entertainers.

Pierrots performing on the American Palace Pier (St Leonards Pier) (HPC058.011)

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Roller Skating

St Leonards Pier, renamed the American Palace Pier In 1909 to reflect its new ownership by the 'American Syndicate', introduced a variety of



novel entertainments in order to compete with Hastings Pier. Among these was **roller skating** or 'rinking', which became a very popular Edwardian pastime.

Roller Skating on the American Palace Pier (HPC041.089)

Punch & Judy



Probably Britain's greatest Punch and Judy performer was Percy Press. He performed in many places throughout a long career, but is remembered for his two main pitches, at London's Madam Tussauds during the winter months, and on the pier at Hastings during the summer.

Percy Press on Hastings Pier (HPC068.011)

Angling



Although usually thought of as a pursuit for men trying to get away from it all, angling could also be a family activity. The Hastings and St Leonards Angling Association was based on Hastings Pier, and both piers hosted angling competitions.

Alice Street baiting her father's fishing rod (HPC059.005)

Speedboat rides



Left: Sunshine. Soft sea-breezes. And more dolce far niente.

Below: You want to go on the sea as well as in it? There's every sort of boating to be had at Hastings. Two safe lakes for children, pleasure-steamers, rowing boats, sailing boats, speed boats. Here is one of the last, slung on it's davits, on the Pier.



In addition to steam ship excursions, after WWII the Pier gained a brand new red speedboat, whose coxswain had been the skipper of a minelaying torpedo boat during the war.

Speedboat hanging from its davits (HPC041.128)

Animals on the Pier

In the 1960s, being photographed with a monkey was a popular pastime on the Pier. One large and troublesome woolly monkey was called Oaf. He once escaped and caused havoc in the arcades until caught by his owner, who had been rushed there by the police. When he arrived, Oaf lolloped up to him, jumped on his shoulders, and did the full Tarzan for the stunned crowd of onlookers. Another of the monkeys was called Elvis.



Family on Hastings Pier with monkeys (HPC037.001)



In the 1970s there was a zoo in the Triodome. It contained only small animals, birds, and reptiles. The caged creatures were arranged around the outside and there was a circular section in the middle where children could lean over and pet the animals. One section was called Old McDonald's Farm.

The zoo closed in late 1974, and a charity bought some of the animals, including ten hens and 20 rats.

Other amusements on the Pier

After the zoo moved out of the Triodome it contained a funfair for a while, which then moved out onto the Pier itself, with a boating lake and sometimes a circus. (HPC032.015, HPC014.032)



Fortune Telling

In 1928, Palmo, "England's Premier Scientific Palmist" was to be found on the pier, and was still there in 1934. In 1939 there was "Madam Lena, World-renowned scientific palmist, psychic adviser and clairvoyant". In the 1990s it was "Sharon McKay, Clairvoyante, Palmiste, of Celtic Romany Origin". (HPC067.053)



Aerial Displays



Red Arrows Display, 1982 (HPC043.013)

Chess

For some years' the Hastings International Chess Tournament was held on Hastings Pier. During the centenary celebrations in 1995 Sir Patrick Moore Stewart participated in a Living Chess game on the Pier. After the 2010 fire an organiser reminisced that the Pier had not been an ideal venue as it swayed underfoot. (HPC040.002)



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