



## The Seaside

### The Piers

**The Palace Pier and the West Pier are arguably the most well-known and popular icons of Brighton & Hove seafront throughout the years. The piers have always been a great source of inspiration for local writer and stories of working and promenading them are consistent recollections in QueenSpark Books.**

**On this page and in [Piers in the 30s and 40s](#) and [Red Arrow Air Show](#) you can explore local memories of the Piers during the first half of the 20th century.**

#### **Early days of the Pier**

The Pier became extremely popular - in 1875 for example, 875, 000 people visited it. As a result, in 1893, the owners decided to enlarge it by widening the seaward end and erecting a large Pavilion on it. The new building, at first used for concerts, was converted into a theatre in 1903 and this is the building we can see today.

After the landing stages were built in 1902, paddle steamers used to call to take people on trips along the coast. In between the landing stages and the main Pier there was a lagoon which was the centre for many aquatic entertainments. There were diving exhibitions by Zoe Brigden and Gladys Powsey, and there was the famous Professor Reddish who used to dive off the West Pier on his bicycle.

It's strange that I had never been on the West Pier before I applied for a vacancy, although I had lived in Hove for quite a few years. I thought it would be quite frightening working over the sea; strange thing was you never noticed it. Several times I saw porpoises basking in the sea. The first time I thought they were whales.

*Daphne Mitchell - [Oh What a Lovely Pier](#)*

#### **The two Piers in the 20s**

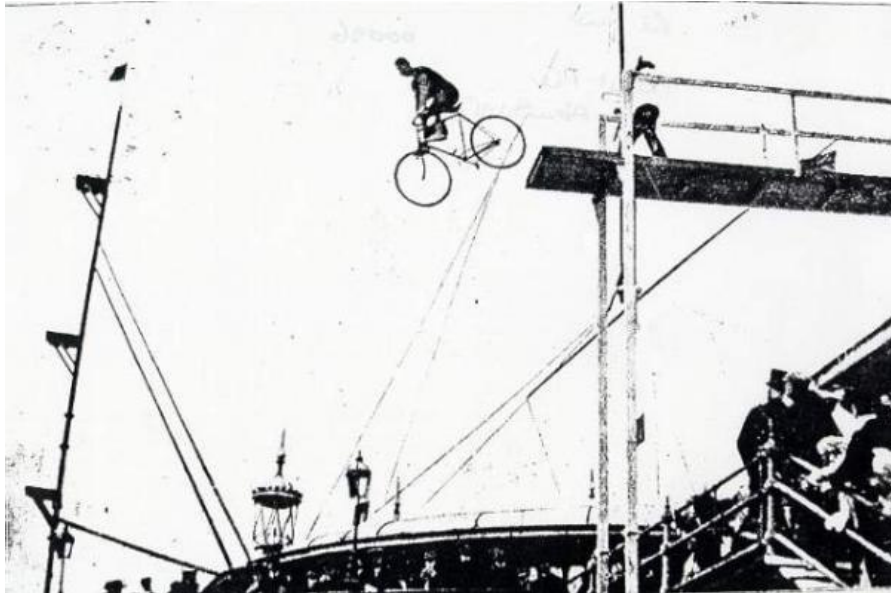
The two piers were a great source of entertainment and in 1928, when my friend and I were both twenty, we used to spend a lot of time on them. I preferred the West Pier: it wasn't as long as the Palace Pier, but I liked the more sedate atmosphere. It was kept in beautiful condition and after the ravages of the sea and the weather of winter, there began a grand spring cleaning effort, where underparts were checked for damage before the arrival of the paddle steamers each Easter. The paintwork was then restored and any worn planking replaced. We used to look forward to trips on the steamers.

*Marjory Batchelor - [A Life Behind Bars](#)*

# 20th Century Sparks!

## The Seaside

### The Piers - continued



**Professor Powsey's Terrible Cycle Dive., c. 1913**  
*Brighton & Hove in Pictures*



**Bank Holiday on Palace Pier, c. 1936**  
*Brighton & Hove in Pictures*



## **The Seaside**

### **Brighton piers in the 30s & 40s**

I loved going on the two piers. Brighton Palace Pier was my favourite; the West Pier was more for the adults to enjoy.

In those days you had to pay to go onto the piers. The Palace Pier had more machines to play on, at a penny a go. I don't remember ever winning any money on these machines.

Some of the machines had flicking, moving pictures which was very exciting especially one called 'What the Butler Saw'. I did not really understand the story it was telling, but found the adults were laughing, especially the ladies who giggled when viewing this machine. As to the present day machines, I am sure my granny would have been horrified, "Evil devils!" she would have exclaimed.

There was a very different atmosphere then; people appeared to get lots of pleasure from experiencing simple things: just walking the length of the pier, down one side and back up the other; sitting watching the sea and people on the beaches below.

I always wore my Sunday best when we went on the piers. Every summer they held a Bathing Belles Carnival competition on the Palace Pier. The pier was usually crowded on the day it was held. Mother had a friend, Dorothy, who used to enter the competition. One year she came third and the adults had tea in the posh cafe near the end of the pier and I was given a large ice cream in a dish.

Another treat was going with Granny on the paddle steamers which we boarded on the end of the Palace Pier. I was fascinated by the engine room, where I could see the large paddles going round when the boat began to move and all the highly polished brass machinery. The best trip was going to the Isle of Wight. This usually took about four hours there and four hours back again. We took a packed lunch with us, but when we anchored at Ryde I was allowed an ice-cream with Granny having a cup of tea. Along the seafront near the bandstand just past the West Pier, there used to be donkey rides and a Punch and Judy Show. I would stay and watch for a long time if my mother allowed me. I never became tired of watching and laughing at this remarkable show. I still watch Punch and Judy if I ever see one being performed.

*Barbara Chapman - Boxing Day Baby*

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### Red Arrow Air Show

August bank holiday - a thronging West Pier.

Out of a brilliant, clear blue sky they came, streaking past in vivid-red silence, followed next instant by a massive roar. The Red Arrows.

First in a diamond wedge tight as a fist they looped, then line ahead they looped again, flashing a few dozen feet over our pier before buzzing the Palace Pier.

After such preliminaries they really got going. Two clever-devils broke away and did breathtaking and obviously dangerous feats while the other seven played above, all now using multi-coloured smoke-trails; overall a fantastic spectacle. Soon the most hair-raising stunt of the clever devil duo unfolded.



Red arrows in formation  
[www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk](http://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk)

One of the pair flew east beyond the Palace Pier whilst the other went west, away from our overcrowded pleasure-planks. Then, simultaneously, they both executed a tight U-turn and set course, one for our West Pier, the other for the Palace Pier, losing height as they approached. Each zoomed a score or so feet above their respective piers, still sharply losing height! - thus heading at the water and... pointed directly at each other!

Then, almost zero feet above the water they levelled off, still heading directly at each other over that stretch of water between the two piers. At the last possible instant they banked sideways, one right one left, thus flashing their underbellies by each other, wing-tips al-most skimming the water.

I distinctly recall leaning on the pier rail (I was 'working') looking DOWN at the two planes executing this manoeuvre, more than once, streaming fabulous multi-coloured smoke.

Another trick was for the whole nine, line ahead, to zoom between the two most prominent high-rise buildings - the Metropole and Grand, I think - on the seafront...

As I recall it a tragic sequel to this display made it stand out as all the more spectacular. Not so very many months after doing their Brighton high-summer show the Red Arrows, while putting on another display elsewhere, were involved in a serious crash into spectators, among whom fatalities occurred.

The powers that be decided that, henceforth, for reasons of public safety the altitude level of the Red Arrow stunts had to be raised.

*The actual date of the Red Arrows display was August 7th, 1970.*

*Arthur Thickett - Deckhand, West Pier*