

The Seaside Pier

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Introduction

The 1860s was the great decade of building piers around the United Kingdom. These were curious, yet appealing and exciting, structures that jutted out into Britain's grey seas; and where promenaders could take the air and imagine that they were walking the deck of an ocean-going ship.

Moreover, piers were also venues for mass entertainment, with concert halls, theatres, bandstands, sideshows, and landing stages for sightseeing steamers. Consequently, piers became a vital attraction for the developing seaside resorts of the 19th Century.



(Picture above - Margate Jetty - Opened 1855 - Designed by Eugenius Birch)

Eugenius Birch

The master builder of Britain's piers was Eugenius Birch (1818 - 1884) the 19th Century English naval architect, engineer, and noted pier builder. Birch built his first pier at Margate in 1853; and his last one at Plymouth in 1884.



(Picture above - Plymouth Pier - Opened 1884 - Designed by Eugenius Birch)

During his career, Birch worked his way around the coast of Britain and built fourteen piers in total. The majority of the piers, included Blackpool, Brighton, Hastings, Eastbourne, and Scarborough, were erected in the 1860s using a screw-pile technique that Birch had perfected at Margate.



(Picture above - Eastbourne Pier - Opened 1872 - Designed by Eugenius Birch)

The engineering technique was revolutionary - the piers were anchored to the seabed with patented cast-iron screw piles. The first pile for the Eastbourne pier was screwed into the seabed in 1866.



(Picture above - Blackpool, North Pier - Opened 1863 - Designed by Eugenius Birch)

In 1863, Blackpool's North Pier was completed, by Birch, at a cost of £13,500.



(Picture above - Brighton, West Pier - Opened 1863 - Designed by Eugenius Birch)

Brighton's West Pier was constructed, by Birch, in 1869 at a cost £30,000.

This pier had elegant wrought-iron kiosks and glass screens that protected the visitors from the harsh channel winds.



(Picture above - Brighton palace Pier - Opened 1899 - Designed by R St George Moore)

Brighton's Palace Pier (started in 1891) reflects the intricate architecture and elegance that evolved with the seaside pier.



(Picture above - Brighton Palace Pier- Opened 1899 - Designed by R St George Moore)



(Picture above - Worthing Pier - Opened 1862 - Built by the Worthing Pier Company)

Thus it was that piers reflected the innate connection between an island people and their surrounding sea, and enabled the day-visiting promenaders to imagine that they were indeed walking on the deck of an ocean-going ship. And it is no small wonder that their popularity has stood the test of time and changing fashion.



(Picture above - Brighton Palace Pier - Today)

Appendix - List of - Eugenius Birch's Piers

- Deal Pier (1855)
- Margate Pier (1855)
- Blackpool, North Pier (1863)
- Brighton, West Pier (1863) (Destroyed in 1975, 2003, 2004)
- Aberystwyth Royal Pier (1865)
- Lytham Pier, Lancashire (1865)
- Birnbeck Pier, Weston-super-Mare (1867) (Currently closed to the public)
- Brighton Aquarium (1869 and 1872)
- Scarborough Pier (1869)
- Eastbourne Pier (1872)
- Hastings Pier (1872)
- Hornsea Pier, North Humberside (1879)
- Plymouth Pier (1884)
- Bournemouth Pier, Boscombe, (1888)

End

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