

= West Pier =

The West Pier is a pier in Brighton , England . It was designed by Eugenius Birch , opening in 1866 and closing in 1975 . The pier was the first to be Grade I listed in Britain but has become increasingly derelict since closure .

The pier was constructed during a boom in pleasure pier building in the 1860s , and was designed to attract tourism in Brighton . It was the town 's second pier , joining the Royal Suspension Chain Pier of 1823 . It was extended in 1893 , and a concert hall was added in 1916 . The pier reached its peak attendance during this time , with 2 million visitors between 1918 and 1919 . Its popularity began to decline after World War II , and concerts were replaced by a funfair and tearoom . A local company took ownership in 1965 , but could not meet the increased maintenance cost , and ultimately filed for bankruptcy . They could not find a suitable buyer , so the pier closed in 1975 and subsequently fell into disrepair .

The West Pier Trust now owns the pier and has proposed various plans to renovate it . Some schemes have been opposed by local residents and the owners of the nearby Palace Pier , who have claimed unfair competition . The pier gradually collapsed during the early 21st century . Major sections collapsed in late 2002 , and two fires in March and May 2003 left little of the original structure . Subsequently , English Heritage declared it to be beyond repair . Structured demolition took place in 2010 to make way for the observation tower i360 ; further structural damage from storms has occurred since .

= = History = =

= = = 19th century = = =

The West Pier was constructed during a boom in pleasure pier building in the 1860s , during which 22 new piers were erected across Britain . It was designed by architect Eugenius Birch as a place for seaside visitors to enjoy fresh sea air . Some wealthy residents in the nearby Regency Square objected to construction , complaining that the planned toll houses at the entrance would spoil the view of the sea from their homes . It was felt that the pier would have a positive effect on property values in the town , so the pier was approved . Construction began in 1863 and the pier opened to the public on 6 October 1866 .

The pier had a length of 1 @, @ 115 feet (340 m) and a width of 310 feet (94 m) at the pierhead . It was built with cast iron threaded columns screwed into the seabed . The superstructure 's ironwork was manufactured by Robert Laidlaw , featuring an " oriental " style . Upon opening , the pier was fitted with gas lamps with ornamental serpent designs , which had been directly influenced by similar examples inside the nearby Royal Pavilion . The pier had ornamental houses , two toll houses and glass screens at the pierhead to protect visitors from the weather . A New Scientist report covering Britain 's piers called the pier Birch 's " masterpiece " .

In 1893 , the pierhead was extended under the supervision of Birch 's nephew , Peregrine , who added a pavilion with a capacity for 1400 people . After the Royal Suspension Chain Pier was demolished following a storm in 1896 , the West Pier became the only one on Brighton 's seafront until the construction of the Palace Pier .

= = = 20th century = = =

In April 1900 , seven sailors from HMS Desperate drowned in bad weather as they approached the pier .

By the early 20th century , the earlier priority of good sea air on the pier had been replaced with a desire for public entertainment . The pier reached record levels of attendance in the early 20th century , attracting around 1 @. @ 5 million visitors between 1910 and 1911 . Attendance fell due to the onset of World War I , but resumed afterwards , with around 2 million people visiting between

1918 and 1919 .

Competition with the Palace Pier led to a new concert hall , designed by local architects Clayton & Black . The 19th century bandstand was demolished between 1914 and 1916 . It was replaced by an eight @-@ sided grand concert hall , constructed from cast @-@ iron arches . It opened on 20 April 1916 with a concert by the King 's Royal Rifles silver band , made up of war veterans .

The concert hall had its own in @-@ house orchestra by November , and ticket sales for concerts accounted for 43 % of the pier 's revenue by 1920 . The West Pier was favoured by locals , while the Palace Pier was used more by day trippers . A top @-@ deck entrance was added to the hall in 1932 . The pier 's central decking was removed during World War II to prevent enemy landings , and its popularity began to decline . On 26 November 1944 a Royal Air Force Hawker Typhoon fighter hit the pier , crashing onto the beach . The pilot sustained head injuries . The Typhoon was one of four aircraft escorting a VIP flight .

The concert hall was converted into a tea room and the theatre redesigned as a restaurant in the early 1950s . A funfair was added around the same time . By the 1960s , the pier was suffering from serious financial difficulties . In 1965 , it was bought by a company that owned some seafront hotels and entertainment venues . They had ambitions for the pier but were unable to cope with increasing maintenance costs . Some portions of wood and iron from the pier fell on the beach , and the pierhead was closed in 1970 due to safety concerns . The pier was Grade II listed in 1969 and the council served compulsory repair notices , but the company was unable to afford them and opted for voluntary liquidation . The remainder of the pier was closed in 1975 when the Brighton Corporation declined to buy it , passing control to the Crown Estates Commissioners .

= = Restoration = =

After 1975 , various attempts were made to restore the pier . Supporters complained that the council was more interested in developing Brighton Marina . In 1982 , the pier became the only one in Britain to be awarded Grade I listed status . The West Pier Trust was formed to save the pier , and bought it from the council in 1983 for a peppercorn fee of £ 100 , though the council also demanded £ 800 @, @ 000 required for immediate repairs before it could be opened to the public . A proposal to restore the pier with a 60 @-@ metre (200 ft) ferris wheel failed after the backer went bankrupt .

The pier suffered structural damage due to the Great Storm of 1987 , and access from the shore was removed for safety reasons in 1991 . The West Pier Trust continued to offer regular tours of the pier throughout the 1990s . In 1998 , the National Lottery pledged £ 14 million to restore the pier , but the West Pier Trust was unable to find a suitable partner to help with restoration . The owners of the Palace Pier , who had become financially self @-@ sufficient under their own means , claimed unfair competition . In 2001 , English Heritage identified the pier as the most at @-@ risk Grade I listed structure in the United Kingdom .

= = Decline and damage = =

In December 2002 , the pier partially collapsed during a storm , when a walkway connecting the concert hall and pavilion fell into the sea . The following month , the concert hall in the middle of the pier fell over , leaving the entire structure close to total collapse .

On 28 March 2003 the pavilion at the pierhead caught fire . Fire crews were unable to save the building from destruction because the collapsed walkway prevented them from reaching it . The cause of the fire remains unknown , since fire investigators were unable to access the site for safety reasons . A more severe fire burned through 11 and 12 May 2003 , consuming most of what was left of the concert hall . On 23 June 2004 , high winds caused the middle of the pier to collapse completely . The following month , English Heritage declared the pier to be beyond repair .

Despite these setbacks , the West Pier Trust remained adamant that they would soon begin full restoration work . Retired boxer Chris Eubank criticised the delays in restoring the pier , saying he could raise the money himself in six months . In December 2004 , the Trust confirmed the

restoration would not be going ahead after their plans were rejected by the Heritage Lottery Fund . The pier was partially demolished in February 2010 , partly to make way for the planned i360 observation tower . In February 2014 , due to stormy weather , the pier split in half and a large part of the centre fell into the sea . Waves swept away the eastern side of the damaged metal skeleton , which remained after the 2003 fire . A selection of artefacts rescued from the pier is exhibited in the Brighton Fishing Museum . A further section of the pier collapsed in 2016 .

= = Media appearances = =

The pier can be seen in several films , including Oh ! What a Lovely War (1968) and Carry On Girls (1973) which was filmed on the pier and in locations nearby in Brighton . It was also prominently featured in the French comedy La Course à l'échalote (1975) , starring Pierre Richard and Jane Birkin .

In Nick Cave 's novel The Death of Bunny Munro , Bunny 's son speculates on a reason for the 2003 fires . The band James filmed the video for " Just Like Fred Astaire " on and around the West Pier .