

## Teignmouth Pier



Teignmouth Pier was built between 1865-67 by Joseph Wilson, an engineering consultant from London at a cost of around £8000. He also acted as an assistant engineer on the construction of Crystal Palace. His first pier design was for Bognor Regis in 1864 (now listed at Grade II), he was involved in 2 other pier construction, at Hunstanton (1870-1; demolished 1978) and Westward Ho! pier (also demolished).

The Earl of Devon drove the first pile for the pier in 1865 and nationally it was the thirteenth pier to be erected. It was officially opened in 1867.

The pier base is constructed by the use of 'screw piles' which basically are cast iron tubes screwed into the sand until they meet some resistance at the clay level of the strata and provide a relatively stable base for the structure.



Pre pier view along Teignmouth beach.

These visitors are alighting at Eastcliff where the original railway station was built.

Originally around 700 ft. in length Teignmouth Pier was initially used as a landing stage to allow steamboat passengers access to the shore and town. A basic construction of walkway and seating along the length of the pier it was lit by gas globes on cast iron supports. Turnstiles allowed visitors to promenade along the deck at a charge of 1d (about 50p in today's terms). The pier also became a dividing line for bathing machines used on the beach, with gentlemen on the western side (the Ness) and ladies to the eastern side.

Later purchased by a Mr Arthur Denby it was his idea to dismantle the structure and relocate it to Paignton but this was not possible due to structural problems, so a new pier was built at Paignton and Teignmouth Pier was restored and reopened in July 1876.

Some improvements were carried out including a pavilion at the shore end, where an orchestra played twice daily and there were magic lantern shows and roller skating. Work was also carried out on the landing stage area at the sea end of the pier including the building of the Castle Pavilion. This was finished during 1890.

Teignmouth had become a popular seaside town during Victorian times and this structure further enhanced its standing so much that local entrepreneurs began putting up further stalls along the pier, serving refreshments and amusements including an original 'What The Butler Saw' photo machine.

Also during this period the local yacht club built a clubhouse on the deck and the swimming and life-saving society added a wooden building on the deck. This society staged water polo matches which drew large crowds to the pier.



Pier during Edwardian times

Image: Herald Express

In 1908 the pier suffered partial collapse when waves breached the sea wall and the entrance pavilion collapsed onto the beach. The entrance was redesigned to include a tea veranda on the first-floor.



1908 damage.

Image: Teignmouth Museum



1908 damage.



1908 damage.



1908 damage.

During the 1920's the pier was a popular stopping off point for steamer journeys along the coast.



The Duchess of Devon moored by the pier in 1922



1925 image showing the theatre at the end of the pier with a steamer docking.

Image: Herald Express

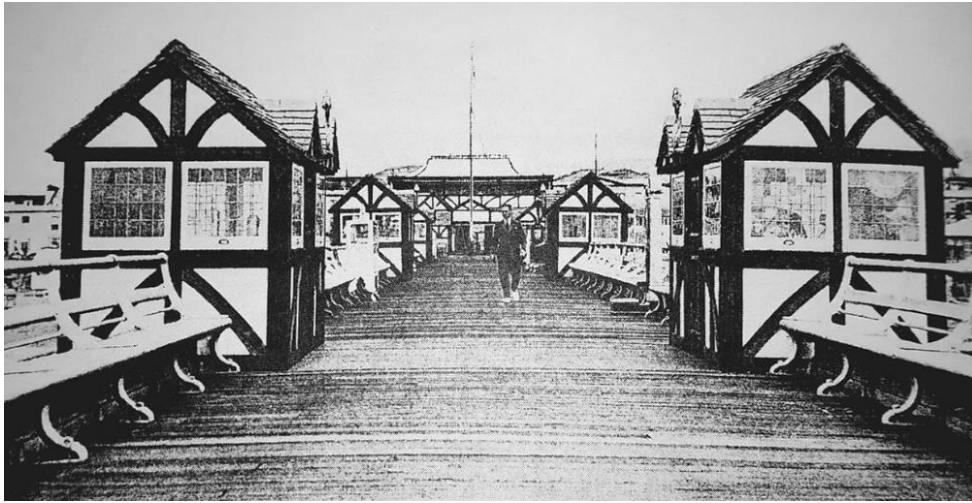


Image showing the pier in the 1930's



Image showing the inside of the ballroom in the 1930/40's.



Evelyn Ward band that entertained customers in the ballroom.

Image: Viv Wilson



Aerial image showing the extent of the pier with landing stage. 1939.

Image: © English Heritage



Image showing the pier and the beach defences during WW2.

During WW2 a section of the pier footway was removed to prevent any German invasion forces from being able to use the pier as easy access to the town. This was in common with very nearly all piers along the channel sea coast and after the end of the war it was some years before all the piers were returned to their pre-war state. Despite several air raids on Teignmouth the pier did not suffer any bomb damage but strafing of the pier did have an effect on one item at the time .....



A roll of tickets stopped this bullet during a raid in WW2.

Image: Richard Austin



View looking back towards the town. Post-war.

Throughout the 20th century the pier underwent continual repair and replacement. In spite of extensive upgrading in the 1950s, the pier increasingly fell into decay. In the early 1960's, the bridge connecting the landing stage to the rest of the pier structure was dismantled following a fire thereby reducing the pier's length by 75 feet.

The last dance was held in 1962 and the ballroom was demolished in 1975. By the end of the 1970s major strengthening works and refurbishment were ongoing including the installation of a new deck and piles. A groyne scheme had created a problem with many of the old wooden piles and extra work became necessary at the shore end to repair the damage

In 1975 the Castle pavilion on the pier was demolished due to ever rising maintenance costs and was replaced by fairground rides and a go-kart track.

A new entrance frontage was installed in 1990. In 2002, new walkways, 5 feet wide and 75 feet or so long on 14 steel piles driven down 80ft. into the bedrock were added in order to comply with fire safety requirements.



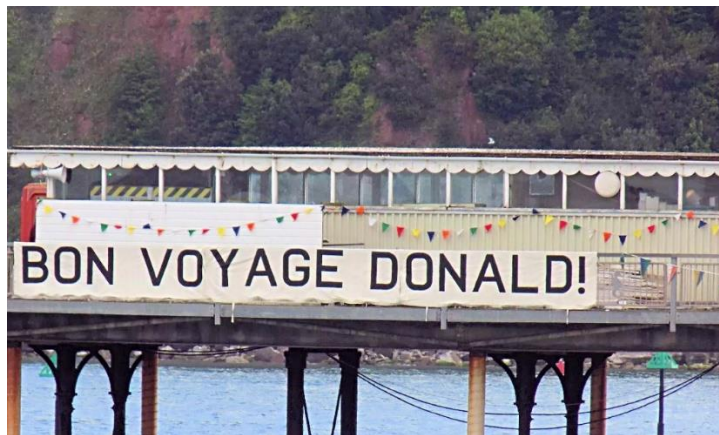
The pier in the 2010's.

In February 2014, the pier was closed after being badly damaged by a storm which created huge waves and strong winds. Repair costs were estimated to be in the hundreds and thousands of pounds. The pier eventually reopened in July 2014. The building had been transformed and new retail units and new machines had been installed, although parts of the pier deck remained closed.



Pier and seafront being battered by storm waves.

In June 2015 Teignmouth Pier was used for filming the story of Donald Crowhurst and his attempt to sail around the globe single handed. Released in 2018, entitled *The Mercy* it has Colin Firth and Rachel Weisz as its principal characters.



Pier decorated for the filming.

In November 2016, armoured steel was installed on Teignmouth pier. Lucie Cooper, director of Teignmouth Pier, said: "We decided after the storms of 2014 to come up with a solution to the weak points of the Pier to make sure that the damage never happens again. These baffles should dissipate the water around and stop it damaging the pier. It is a pre-emptive move rather than a reactive move, as it only takes one breach, so if should there be another storm, the Pier should be protected."

In July 2018 an unexploded WW2 bomb was found under the pier. The Royal Navy blew up the 2,600lb bomb after the beach had been evacuated.

In January 2020 the end section of the privately-owned Grand Pier was demolished. The owners blamed the catastrophic damage in the storms of February 2014. The owners also say other major factors were to blame, including the continual sand dredging off Teignmouth which constantly undermines the pier supports and the falling number of holidaymakers to the town.

In January 2022 plans were put forward to regenerate the pier with one of the possibilities being considered to create a landing area for pleasure boats and water taxis. Teign Estuary Partnership were keen to find a landing site and has been looking at using the disused Morgan Giles stone piers at Morgan's Quay



In July 2022 an old sentry box from the seafront was renovated and turned into a “peep box”. The box – outside Teignmouth’s Grand Pier – allows people to look inside and see how the town looked in old and more recent times.

November 2023 saw the pier again damaged by a storm and following repair the timber structure is now protected by steel sheeting which should prove more resilient in future.



Storm damage Nov 2023.



Repaired!



Under the pier. December 2023

and

June 2024.

This shows the extent of the corrosion that the sea water has caused to the pier.



Pier as it is today in 2024.

All this work has meant considerable alteration to the historic character of the pier. The entire decking structure has been replaced with imported hardwood planks (Yellow Balou, a hard wood from Borneo) fixed with modern stainless-steel fixings. None of the original handrails, seating or lighting remain. Very little of the original buildings survive either.

The history of Teignmouth pier shows that it has been a focal point for seaside holiday activities for over 150 years and has seen extensive use for many leisure pursuits. Clearly it is a building that has strong local importance and has some significance being one of only two piers that

remain in the South West of England. Its silhouette continues to have strong visual impact on the seafront and it has a visual relationship with the adjacent listed seaside villas of the Den Crescent (listed at Grade II). Despite this, the level of alteration and work at Teignmouth pier is so extensive that little of the historic structure survives and its historic character has been diminished.

A great shame.



View from the observation deck adjacent to the coastguards station. 2024.



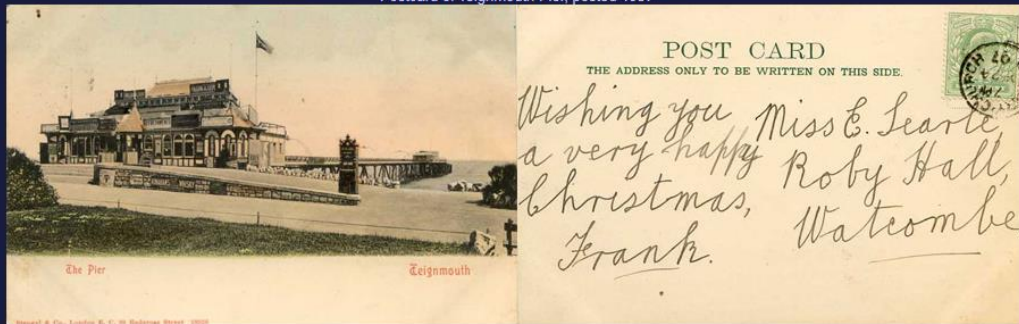
We can date this view from the top of the skew bridge, Eastcliff, to 1966 (66)

Postcards from Teignmouth (featuring the pier)

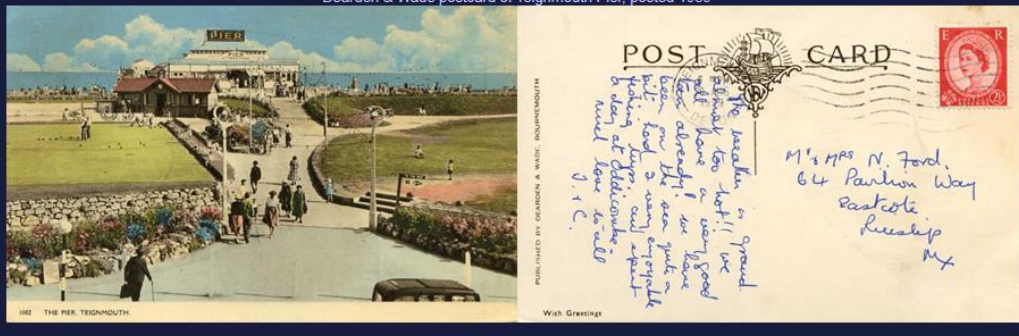




Postcard of Teignmouth Pier, posted 1907



Dearden & Wade postcard of Teignmouth Pier, posted 1959



Sources: National Heritage Gateway (British Seaside Piers by C.Mawson & R.Riding); Wikipedia; National Piers Society; Teignmouth Grand Pier; Teignmouth Post; Torquay Herald; Teignmouth Pier, a pictorial history by Viv Wilson; Devon Live; Simplon; English Heritage.