

## **West Pier Trust Newsletter – February 2003**

### **NEWSLETTER TO MEMBERS OF THE TRUST**

#### **1. Introduction**

As members know, the Trust has been predicting that structural damage to the pier would occur in the winter sea conditions of 2002/3. We have been trying, desperately, to use those predictions to inject greater urgency into the public authorities on whom action on the restoration rests. We failed; I assure you that we pleaded, cajoled, threatened etc, virtually daily through the spring and summer of 2002, but by the time we achieved agreement (on emergency action to save the Concert Hall intact) it was too late for such action to take place prior to this winter. I am not, at this time, going to identify the organisations and individuals whose lack of urgency or flexibility was responsible for our failure.

The partial collapses on 29th December and 20th January do not affect our ability to restore the West Pier. They require us to adjust our engineering plans and they might alter the costs marginally. What has been lost is our ability to re-use the original framework if the Concert Hall intact. It is a considerable psychological loss, and all of the officers of the Trust are sad and angry at that loss. However, we have very detailed records (plans, photographs, film, laser studies) which will allow us to recreate the Concert Hall faithfully; and we have sufficient stored materials and artefacts to include original pieces in that restoration.

Our hope is that the collapse will prove more successful than our predictions of them in 'waking up' the authorities to the urgency of the need for physical action, rather than talk and paper work, if we are to save and restore the West Pier. It is too early for me to give you any indication of their reaction. The first decision rests with Brighton & Hove City Council in regard to granting planning permission for the restoration and the enabling development. We had hoped that would be dealt with at this month's planning committee meeting but it is now scheduled for its meeting in late February. We will publish the outcome on our website. If permission is granted then our funding partners (St Modwen Properties and the Heritage Lottery Fund) will have the assurance they require before financing significant physical action this year.

#### **2. Communication**

Although we try to keep you informed through these newsletters, it is the case that we use our website and the media to release information and news more immediately. The website address is [www.westpier.co.uk](http://www.westpier.co.uk)

As to the media, our local members are kept informed through the Argus (almost daily), local radio and TV. Nationally, we have published stories in all of the broadsheet newspapers and on national TV and radio.

Internationally, over the past month news on the pier has been carried by the global satellite channels and many national/state TV channels in continental Europe, North America, Australasia etc.

I attach a copy of my note of 5th January briefing the media on our response to the first partial collapse. The content remains relevant after the second partial collapse.

#### **3. Conclusion**

Whenever I struggle to be positive about our situation I only have to turn to our Chairman. Sir Lindsay's determination to secure the restoration is inspiring. The daily struggle is frustrating but the basic fact remains that our private sector partner (St Modwen), the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and Brighton & Hove City Council are committed to achieving the restoration of the West Pier; and recent events have shown the local, national and international support for that aim. It is time for those good intentions and that global goodwill to be expressed in action.

**29th January 2003 Dr Geoff Lockwood Chief Executive**

**General Manager's Information**

The public reaction to the recent collapses has sustained us during a testing period. We received over 200 emails and many letters expressing support for the Trust and urging us on. Many were local but others came from all over the world. This made a great difference. The daily frustrations described by Geoff above can have a debilitating effect eventually. The goodwill and encouragement expressed in the messages was inspiring and has helped enormously over the last few weeks.

Whilst life has been dominated by the collapses, we are aware that a new season is approaching and we should capitalise on the recent attention given to the pier. Since the tours stopped for safety reasons in October 2001, the main commercial activity has been the market. This has gone from strength to strength and we are optimistic about its performance in 2003. Norma Binnie has successfully developed it as a popular seafront activity and in dry weather it attracts big crowds. This year, in addition, we will reopen the Information Kiosk, initially on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays (when the office is closed) and, our limited means permitting, we will extend our merchandise.

Currently the merchandise on offer are the two videos (Murmuration and Sean Clark's new video showing the pier underwater), the history of the pier 'Walking on Water' by Professor Fred Gray, prints and pictures, postcards and small items such as pencils and bookmarks. All of these are available mail order either via our website or by calling the office (01273 321499).

Finally, I'd like to thank Anna Kempton for her continuing help in the office. Anna has been working, on a voluntary basis, as the Trust's Membership Secretary for almost six years. She also supports me in the office in numerous other ways, including covering for me when I go on holiday. Apart from being extremely efficient, energetic and reliable, her presence is guaranteed to lift any flagging spirits in the office.

**Rachel Clark**  
**General Manager**