



Bravest Pier in the World Event Press Release

The HMS Leigh Project is happy to announce that its long awaited live event on Southend Pier will be taking place Thursday 23rd – Sunday 26th September 2021.

Thanks to the continued dedication of everyone involved in this project, the Bravest Pier in the World Event will be welcoming schools on the Thursday 23rd and Friday 24th September and the public on Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th September, not just to walk the hallowed boards of Southend Pier, but also to learn about the amazing history of the nearly 200 old structure and meet actors playing people from WW2 Southend and HMS Leigh.



Southend Police removing a defused torpedo from the mud near Southend Pier.

With funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Southend Borough Council, and the help of our partners the Leigh-on-Sea Royal British Legion, who are celebrating their 100th anniversary this year, the Southend RNLI who have kept the Thames Estuary safe since 1876, the ever helpful Southend Borough Council Culture and Tourism department, Southend Pier Staff, Southend Pier Museum and the wonderful S.E. Branch of the Essex Society for Family History, we will be celebrating the world class heritage on our doorstep that has been dubbed, 'The Bravest Pier In The World'.

As our visitors enter the Pier at the Pier Hill entrance they will be met by the guns and members of the Shoeburyness Royal Artillery Association before passing through the HMS Leigh Checkpoint.



Southend Pier Staff in the AFS, 1941

From there a walk through the Memory Garden where people can post a photo or buy a biodegradable ribbon to tie onto the railings in memory of a loved one or pet. Our hope is that the Memory Ribbons will all flutter in the wind to bring out the true character of Southend Pier.

The walk along the boards of the Pier will be accompanied by the Bravest Pier Podcast which will bring stories and music from WW2 Southend to





complement the beautiful views from the railings.

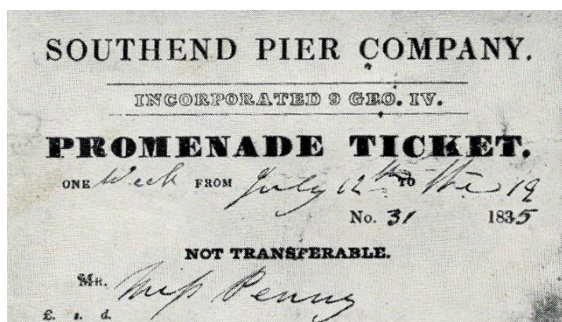
On our schools days the Pier shelters will house actors in period costume portraying some of those characters whose hard work, day-in and day-out for 6 years, turned the longest pleasure pier in the world into a Royal Navy Battle Station.

HMS Leigh defended the Thames, kept London running and dispatched over 80,000 ships on convoys throughout the world all of which helped the Allies eventually to defeat the enemy.

If the schools in Southend and South East Essex, interested in bringing a class, a year or the whole school, would like to find out more about the event or book a slot, they can contact us at schools@hmsleigh.org.uk. Tickets for the Community Days will shortly be available from the HMS Leigh website (www.hmsleigh.org.uk).



Mr F Foy, Southend Pier Railway Driver, WW2



Southend Pier Promenading Ticket, 1835

HMS Leigh Project Officer, Alastair Deacon, “First I’d like say that this whole project wouldn’t have been possible without the marvellous Players of the National Lottery, the wonderful HMS Leigh Team and our fabulous partners and volunteers. This is a cultural festival to celebrate amazing people and amazing heritage right here on the Southend Seafront. When the Royal Navy commandeered the Pier back in August 1939, they swapped Day Tripping Pleasure Boats with Destroyers and promenaders were replaced by Petty Officers - it must have been a monumental task to keep the whole show running. We are so happy to celebrate the ‘Bravest Pier in the World’ Event with the whole Community after having to postpone due to the pandemic.”

“The Leigh-on-Sea Branch of the Royal British Legion are delighted to be involved with this amazing Community project” Bob O’Leary, Secretary, Leigh-on-Sea Branch Royal British Legion.

Michael, Project Assistant and the Event Theatrical Director says: “The history of Southend Pier is so rich, we’ve been able to uncover some amazing stories, thanks to all the people who have brought these to us. I can’t wait to get on the pier in September, it’s going to be a day to remember.”





Anne Jenkins, Director, England Midlands and East, National Lottery Heritage Fund says – “We are delighted to support this project, which thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, will mean that more people will be able to get involved with, protect, and learn about the exciting heritage right on their doorstep.”

Notes to Editors:

For more information, please contact Beth Hooper, HMS Leigh Project Manager beth@blade-education.org.uk or call 07947 008 226

For better quality versions of the images, and attribution details please email us.

Background on Southend Pier

In 1929, thanks to the Prince George Extension, Southend Pier measured 2,158 metres or 1.34 miles and became the longest pleasure pier in the world. Between the wars, Southend Pier was as popular as ever. However, its moment of true glory was to arrive in September 1939, when it was to become Naval Control Centre for the Thames Estuary and was renamed HMS Leigh with surrounding areas becoming HMS Westcliff.

The structure of Southend Pier was tactically a huge advantage in WW2 – with its berths for both big and small ships, buildings, Lloyds Signal Station, devoted staff and probably most crucially, the electric railway. Throughout the war, from the very first day, the Pier Electric Railway was operated by the Pier staff, 24:7. Trains always ran through, covering over 300,000 train miles and carrying 1.5 million service men and women, including the sick and wounded.

During the war years huge amounts of food, ammunition and special equipment were carried on the railway. Acute shortages of staff made maintenance difficult, but this vital link never failed. Today, during the pandemic, it is back in service, housing the staff who are looking after making sure our most vulnerable people have enough food to stay at home.

About the National Lottery Heritage Fund:

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we **Inspire, lead** and **resource** the UK’s heritage to create **positive and lasting change** for people and communities, now and in the future. www.heritagefund.org.uk.





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About Southend-on-Sea Borough Council:

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council is the guardian of Southend Pier, the longest pleasure pier in the world and a major landmark, extending 1.34 miles into the Thames Estuary. Sir John Betjeman once said that "the Pier is Southend; Southend is the Pier". The pier is a Grade II listed building. www.southend.gov.uk

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About BBC Essex:

BBC Essex is supporting the HMS Leigh: Guardian of the Thames project.

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About Blade Education:

Blade Education is a not for profit company based in Leigh-on-Sea that works with local communities to create new ways to tackle social issues, experience heritage and combat disadvantage through art, education and information. We believe passionately in lifelong learning with a special emphasis on building bridges between the older and younger generations and that outdoor learning is the best way for children to understand and engage with the world around them. www.blade-education.org.uk #BladeEducation



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