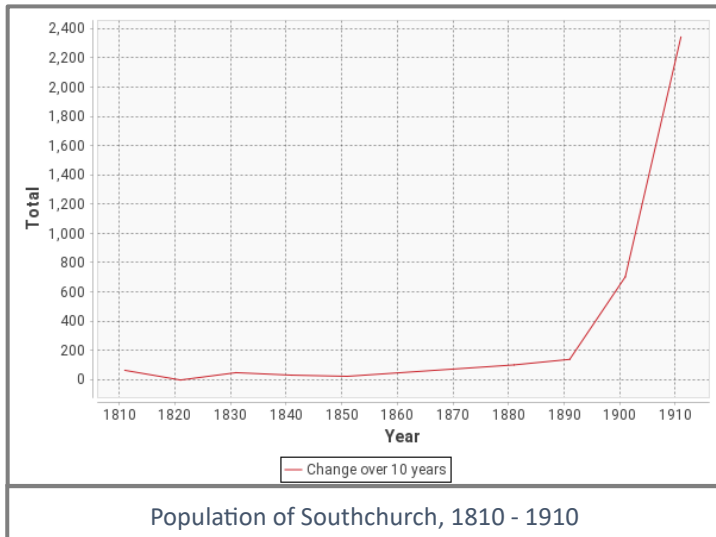


A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

Episode 19: THE GROWTH OF SOUTHEND

Southend grew extremely rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1881 census the population was only 7,979 and was still only 13,500 when Borough status was granted in 1892. By 1909, just seventeen years later, it had increased by about 450% to 61,268. The population of Southchurch followed a similar explosion, albeit on a smaller scale, shooting up from well-under 200 in 1880 to over 2,000 in 1910.



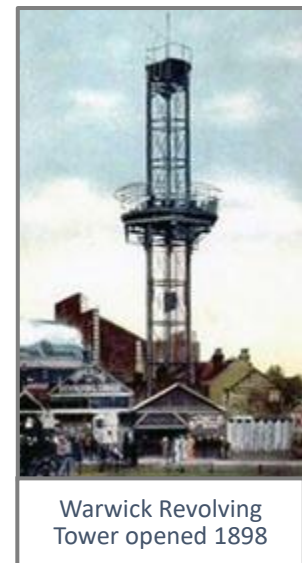
Consequently, Southchurch was the first parish, other than Prittlewell, to be swallowed up in this growth. The process was pragmatic rather than visionary - indeed John William Burrows, editor of the Southend Standard, wrote in his Historical Notes of 1909 that "the extension was brought about owing to the necessity for a new sewerage and outfall system". It is certainly clear that Southend Town Council prized Southchurch's sea front rather more than its farms and scattered dwellings. Alderman J. H. Burrows JP, (the father of John William) argued that Southend

Borough should only seek to acquire the Southchurch Hall Estate and The Oaks, and so much of the parish lying south of the railway and west of the land leading to Thorpe Hall Farm and thence to the sea. This district, he explained, was immediately adjacent to the existing borough. It was about a quarter of the parish of Southchurch and probably about one half of its rateable value. Alderman Howard saw no benefit in obtaining the whole parish, but by nine votes to seven it was decided to apply for the whole parish.

The decision of the Town council caused a good deal of annoyance and uneasiness in Southchurch. The village was, of course, still rural, with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. Mr G.T. Wright ridiculed the supposed benefits. "We might get one or two additional policemen who will wander around and perhaps see that the rabbits do not eat too much corn. We shall get an extra hour for drinking and in return for that we shall blossom into fully fledged burgesses, and there is the remote possibility that, at some time or other, we might have a Mayor elected from our district." The local resistance was led by the Rector, Canon Philpott (hence Philpott Avenue), particularly as the rates in Southend were more than double those of Southchurch. However, in spite of an appeal to the County Council, Southchurch was incorporated into the Borough in 1897.

Finally, an update on local developments from the near contemporary historical notes of Mr Burrows:

- In 1898 the Warwick Revolving Tower opened on Marine Parade, the second of several Warwick Towers built at seaside resorts around England. It was 125ft 8½ inches high and cost £8,000. The lift had room for 200 people but only 150 were allowed to ascend at one time. There was a slight mishap at the opening, and some



councillors were frightened to use it, but Councillor Prevost rallied them and after a time they made a safe ascent and descent.

- In 1899 the Southchurch esplanade and roadway were constructed, and in 1903 the Western and Chalkwell esplanades were carried out at a cost of about £38,000.
- Southchurch Park came as a gift from Messrs. Baxter, Dowsett and Ingram at the close of 1895.
- Towards the close of the summer of 1901 the Council bought Chalkwell Hall with surrounding grounds and 26½ acres of land for £20,000.
- The first tram routes - from the Kursaal to Southchurch Road; from Southchurch Church to Leigh Church; from Victoria Corner round Prittlewell by North Road to the Cricketers – were built, with the first trams running in July 1901.

- The Town Council sought and obtained an Order for the construction of further tramways, from the Kursaal to Shoeburyness, and from the eastern end of the existing tramway at Southchurch to Bournes Green. A small portion of the former only has been carried out, and the remainder of the Order expired by effluxion of time. The delay so fatal to the Order was caused by a strong divergence of view. The



Tram on Southchurch Road

owners of Thorpe Hall Estate wished for a shore route to Shoeburyness, whereas the authorized route cut through their estate, in an effort to get a reasonably short journey and saving of time and mileage cost". An extension to 'Thorpe Hall Corner' was opened in 1912,

- The capital expenditure on electric lighting up to the end of March 1908 totalled £114,440, and on tramways to £86,725.

In short, therefore, Southend gained better sewerage from the takeover, and Southchurch electricity and trams.

Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 20: "The Oyster Song and Dance".

- If the Oyster had a voice, what song would it sing?
- A song especially penned for the 1924 centenary.
- Was there ever music to go with the song?

See all Episodes of 'A Little History of Southchurch' [here](#)