

# ***'The Designation of Amusement Parks and Fairground Rides in England'***

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## **Introduction**

In recent years the definition of 'heritage' has continued to evolve. No longer restricted to castles, cathedrals and country houses, increasingly English Heritage has been considering for protection monuments from our industrial past and institutional buildings ranging from workhouses and prisons to hospitals and schools. At the same time there has also been a growing appreciation of, and public support for, Britain's 20th century heritage and this process of broadening and deepening the definition of heritage led English Heritage to list the Scenic Railway at Dreamland at Margate in 2002. Today the only listed fairground rides are Margate's Scenic Railway, upgraded to II\* in 2011 and the grade II water splash ride in East Park at Kingston-upon-Hull. As the ride at Margate (Kent) was listed it survived the closure of the surrounding amusement park, though designation alas did not confer immunity from fire in 2008.

These designations do not however reflect the true wealth of the amusement park and fairground heritage that survives in Britain. Worldwide thirty-five rollercoasters survive from before 1939, of which four are in Blackpool Pleasure Beach while England also has two scenic railways at Margate and Great Yarmouth. There are also other pre-1939 rides and attractions at Blackpool, including the Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machine of 1904 and the River Caves of the following year, features constructed in the sand dunes prior to the Pleasure Beach's creation. As well as attractions in amusement parks there are also three water splash rides in municipal parks at Kettering (Northamptonshire), Kingston-upon-Hull and Scarborough (North Yorkshire). The ride at Hull is the only one that is listed, although all three date from the 1920s and Kettering's ride is the earliest of the group.

In this paper the changing definition of 'heritage' will be seen reflected in the National Heritage List for England and English Heritage's programme of research into fairgrounds and their rides will be examined. Today the heritage protection of structures is being considered that might once have caused the eyebrows of earlier generations of Ministry of Works Inspectors to have been raised heavenwards.

## **'Heritage' and Protecting the Architecture of Fun**

Around the turn of the 20th century a series of measures were taken to record and protect Britain's historic environment. In 1877 the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings was founded and in 1882 the Ancient Monuments Protection Act established the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments.<sup>1</sup> The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty began work in 1895 and the Victoria County History in 1899.<sup>2</sup> To support the work of these bodies, the creation of national inventories of monuments was needed and so Royal Commissions for Scotland, England and Wales were established. In Scotland the date of the Act of Union in 1707 was set as the terminal date of the survey, while England's initial date was 1700, though this was extended to 1714 on the eve of World War I. Anything dating from after 1714 was classified as 'modern' and therefore not published or recorded in detail. By 1939 the Commissioners of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) agreed to include a selection of 18th and 19th century buildings, a decision formalised after the war when a new Royal Warrant allowed them to informally adopt the terminal date of 1850.

Listing was invented at the same time as the Welfare State (the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act); it was a means of helping post-war reconstruction by identifying those buildings and structures that had a high claim to respect. Such claims were defined as having *special interest*. This came in two varieties: architectural and historical. From the very start, listing concerned itself with the stories and ideas around buildings as well as with their built form.<sup>3</sup>

A List composed only of churches, castles, country houses, cottages, civic set-pieces and the stand-out monuments of commerce and industry would be earnest, deserving and sensible, but it would miss out on much of the spice of life, and be glaringly incomplete. The notion that pleasure and fun are fitting topics for study is now well established; Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's ground-breaking study of the history of play in society, *Homo Ludens*, first appeared in English in 1949, only two years after the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act which ushered in listing as we know it today.<sup>4</sup> The listing of pubs and cinemas is now normal, but it wasn't always so. Cinemas began to be

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Sargent, 'RCHME 1908-1998 A History of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England', (*Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, 45, 2001) pp. 57-80, pp. 57ff

<sup>2</sup> Established to preserve and celebrate the rural heritage of England, which was under pressure from industrialisation, the VCH's metropolitan counterpart was the Survey of the Memorials of Greater London (later the Survey of London).

<sup>3</sup> Simon Thurley, *Men from the Ministry. How Britain Saved its Heritage* (New Haven and London: Yale, 2013), pp. 200 ff.

<sup>4</sup> J. Huizinga, *Homo ludens : a study of the play-element in culture* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949)

listed in increasing numbers during the urban re-surveys of the 1980s. English Heritage began a thematic survey of pubs, ushered in by the publication in 1994 of its booklet *Pubs: Understanding Listing*. In recent years, English Heritage's listing programme has further celebrated and embraced popular culture. The designation in 2013 of Manze's pie and mash shop in Walthamstow wasn't the first excursion into the protection of working class eateries, but it was still remarkable enough to warrant a ministerial visit.<sup>5</sup> Lion cages, Beatles-graced zebra crossings, Beatnik basements, model villages, diving boards and skateboard parks have all made it onto the National Heritage List for England (NHLE).<sup>6</sup> Making sure that the List reflects all facets of life is one of guiding principles of 21st century designation.

In 2007 a research project on seaside resorts culminated with books on the evolution of the seaside resort and the seaside heritage of Margate, followed in 2008 and 2014 by books on Weymouth and Blackpool. English Heritage had now moved into a subject area where rollercoasters and amusement parks were a key part of the story and this prompted concerted research into these novel subjects.

Although 10% of all designated assets are reckoned to lie within a mile of the coast, there is always more to do if the designation base is to be a true reflection of our heritage, ancient or modern. Books and unpublished area surveys have taken place at a number of seaside resorts to begin to bring the coverage of the NHLE more up to date, in recognition that keeping up with the emerging appreciation of the seaside's significance needed more work.

Margate is a good case in point. There are now promising signs that heritage-led regeneration is now establishing itself, but only after a prolonged, decades-long period of decline as charabanc, guest house and whelks gave way to charter flight, Mediterranean beach and package holidays abroad. At Margate's heart lies Dreamland. Part of the challenge of re-listing in Margate was to assign a fitting degree of recognition to the significance of this fallen giant of holiday-making, to look below the surface, and to appreciate the

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<sup>5</sup> L. Manze's eel, pie and mash shop at 76 Walthamstow High Street, London Borough of Waltham Forest was listed on 30 October 2013. (NHLE number 1416834)

<sup>6</sup> The lion cages, built by 'Lord' George Sanger after 1874, are located on the west perimeter wall of Dreamland, Margate and were listed in 2009. (NHLE number 1392931) The Abbey Road crossing, renowned as the cover of the Beatles' 1969 album *Abbey Road* was listed in 2010. (NHLE number 1396390). The Casbah Club at 8, Hayman's Green, Liverpool 12, was owned by Pete Best's mother, and decorated by Best, John Lennon and friends; it ran from 1959 to 1962, and was listed in 2006. (NHLE number 1391759) The Model Village at the Old New Inn, Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire was constructed in 1936-40 and listed in 2013. (NHLE number 1413021) The Coate diving platform at Coate Water, Swindon was built in 1935 and listed in 2013 (NHLE number 1417099). The Rom Skate Park, on Upper Rainham Road, Hornchurch, London Borough of Havering, was designed by skateboarder Tony Rolt along the lines of Californian exemplars and opened in 1978. It was listed in August 2014 (NHLE number 1419328).

cultural importance for what it genuinely is. Respect is owed to the champions of such sites as Dreamland, who saw their true importance before everyone else.<sup>7</sup>

One clear finding from the work undertaken in recent years by English Heritage on seaside resorts is that while the lists, most of which date from the 1980s, are very good at capturing pre-1840 heritage, they are rather less good at incorporating more recent buildings, particularly those of the leisure industries. This is a consequence of the legal framework within which listing has to take place.<sup>8</sup> Older buildings are inevitably rarer and therefore more likely to be of special interest. Therefore, before 1700, all buildings containing a significant proportion of their original fabric are listed, from 1700 to 1840, most buildings are listed, but after 1840 because so many more buildings were erected, and have survived, greater selection is required, especially for buildings dating from after 1945. Most of our seaside heritage post-dates 1840 and therefore it is necessary to determine its originality, its aesthetic quality and its special interest.

Approaches to the selection of buildings and structures for listing are described in English Heritage's *Designation Selection Guide: Culture and Entertainment*.<sup>9</sup> Where internal disputes have arisen over the listing of such structures, they tend to centre around concepts of authenticity. When does a much-replaced apparatus cease to be historic? Seaside structures are particularly prone to change. The damp and salty environment attacks fabric, while commercial considerations, health and safety, wear and tear all lead to further alteration. At what point do these considerations fatally undermine authenticity? Heritage is distinctly suspicious of the replica.

Another issue is whether the ephemera of pleasure should be brought into the planning system anyway? Isn't adaptability and updating at the heart of commercial success? Isn't listing, in a word, just too *square* to be relevant? This is where the *historical* aspect of designation kicks in and where the fundamental point of listing comes into view too. Listing is about more than triggering an extra degree of oversight in the management of change, through the planning system, vital though that is. It is a celebration of special interest,

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<sup>7</sup> The Save Dreamland Campaign was founded in 2003 by Nick Laister. <http://www.savedreamland.co.uk/> (accessed 27 August 2014).

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[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/137695/Principles\\_Selection\\_Listing\\_1\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/137695/Principles_Selection_Listing_1_.pdf) (accessed 13 August 2014).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/listing/criteria-for-protection/selection-guidelines/> (accessed 13 August 2014)

a flag of recognition that some buildings and structures (or *heritage assets* in official parlance) warrant recognition and deserve our attention.<sup>10</sup>

English Heritage's *Conservation Principles* can help here too.<sup>11</sup> The fundamental values which contribute to overall significance are *evidential*, *historical*, *aesthetic*, and *communal*. Consideration of the nature of significance should inform our response to applications for change; establishing the grounds of importance will make clearer the route to acceptable proposals. The aesthetics of a centuries-old brick wall would demand a rather different conservation response to the treatment of a painted concrete Modern Movement wall. Remembering the *historical* significance of a structure may enable us to see beyond the *aesthetic* detractions of an altered structure, and remember the *communal* value of a once-popular leisure structure, and recognise signs of change as of note in offering *evidential* insight into its evolution. This approach serves as a helpful corrective to the tendency towards judging candidate assets purely on visual grounds. It serves as a reminder of the importance of associations, alongside the fabric, which takes us back to the guiding principles of listing in the 1940s, when historical interest was first established as one of the twin grounds for listing.

### **English Heritage Research on Rollercoasters and Amusement Parks**

In 2002 the Scenic Railway at Dreamland in Margate was listed Grade II. **Fig 1** This was a feature of the amusement park that opened in 1920 on the former menagerie site of Lord George Sanger's circus (1825?–1911). The Scenic Railway's track was approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile long and each train of three cars could take up to twenty-eight passengers, plus the brakeman. It is a wooden, side-friction rollercoaster with cars on which a brakeman rode to control its speed at fast corners. The cars ran on rails set on to a wooden bed supported by major horizontal timbers. They were guided along the track by side-friction wheels running against boards along the side of the track. The major elements are bolted together, but smaller struts and braces are nailed to the major timbers. Examination of the structure reveals that it has been renewed, often very recently, as it was a high maintenance structure that was expected to be renewed on a rolling seven-year programme.

The engine shed, where the trains were stored and repaired, was destroyed by the 2008 fire, but the motor house, its two electric motors, large manual

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<sup>10</sup> This term has been used since the publication by the Department for Communities and Local Government of the *National Planning Policy Framework* in 2012.

<sup>11</sup> *Conservation Principles. Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (English Heritage, 2008), <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/conservation-principles/> (accessed 14 October 2014).

clutch and the belt drive mechanism for conveying the power to the chain on the lift hill all survived.<sup>12</sup> Following the fire there was a need to reassess the Scenic Railway's listing. This involved re-examining briefly the survival of historic rides in Britain and abroad to assess its significance and at the same time initial research took place to understand the evolution of amusement parks. The result of this research was two-fold. In 2011, despite malicious damage to the ride, the decision was made to upgrade the Scenic Railway to II\*, making it one of the 5.5% of historic buildings accorded this accolade. A useful comparison here can be made with piers, which repeatedly undergo replacement of components: Clevedon Pier is a classic case in point.<sup>13</sup> A lightness of touch is needed when considering the conservation of such buildings: something borne out by such recent examples of seaside regeneration. The old *canard* about listing leading to the preserving in aspic of those buildings unlucky enough to fall beneath its mantle is certainly dispelled here.

The other consequence of the survey was recognition that England had a particularly rich heritage of amusements and rollercoasters, which was inadequately appreciated and protected. In the emerging English Heritage Action Plan for the National Heritage Protection Plan for 2011-15 resources were allocated to allow a national review of Amusement Parks and Fairground Rides and this work took place in 2013.<sup>14</sup>

The project involved assessing what was already designated and what should be considered for future designation. Therefore the key questions were:

- 1 What has existed?
- 2 What remains and how complete is it?
- 3 How rare are the surviving remains and how does England's remaining amusement park heritage compare with what remains internationally?

- 1 What has existed?

The first task was to understand the origins and evolution of the amusement park in England. The surviving seaside parks at Blackpool and Great Yarmouth, and Dreamland at Margate were founded in the late 19th and early 20th century, but the origins of the modern amusement park can be traced

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<sup>12</sup> The fire-damaged Scenic Railway can be seen in the background of Penny Woolcock's 2007 dystopian film *The Margate Exodus*, where it forms the backdrop to a colony of dispossessed migrants.

<sup>13</sup> First listed in 1971, it was upgraded in 2001 to Grade I after the completion of a major restoration programme funded by the HLF. See NHLE entry 1129687.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/national-heritage-protection-plan/> (accessed 27 August 2014).

back to a number of British antecedents as well as the first amusement parks across the Atlantic.

The first strand in their story in Britain is the annual fairs that were held in towns and villages where goods were traded, though increasingly they also provided opportunities for England's rural population to gather and enjoy entertainment. One author described the story of fairs as: 'their origin was religious, their development commercial, and their apotheosis an unrestrained indulgence in pleasure or license, as you may choose to regard their diversions.'<sup>15</sup> **Fig 2**

Although fairs were a temporary if regular annual event, there is evidence that some permanent structures were created. Stourbridge Fair (Worcestershire) was a notable commercial market and an occasion for:

'Coffee-Houses, Taverns, Eating-Houses, Music Shops, Buildings for the Exhibition of Drolls, Puppet Shews, Legerdeman, Mountebanks, Wild Beast, Monsters, Giants, Rope Dancers, etc ... Beside the Booths, there are six or seven brick Houses ... and in any of which the Country People are accommodated with hot and cold Goose, roast or boiled Pork, etc.'<sup>16</sup>

At Weyhill (Hampshire) a range of former hop growers' fair booths, which date from the first half of the 19th century, enclose an elongated U-shaped yard.<sup>17</sup> They were erected by a consortium of hop growers to market their produce and are the last vestiges of Weyhill Fair, first documented in 1225.<sup>18</sup>

Circuses and menageries became a regular feature of fairs by the early 19th century. In the second half of the 19th century the self-appointed 'Lord' George Sanger became the most prominent circus proprietor and menagerie owner and through his establishment of a permanent base in Margate has a direct role in the origins of Dreamland and the modern amusement park.<sup>19</sup> Remarkably, a number of the Victorian cages survive attached to the southern perimeter wall of the site, beside the railway line and these are now listed.

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<sup>15</sup> William B. Boulton, *Amusements of Old London* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 2 vols, 1971), pp. 2, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Robert W. Williamson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973), pp. 20-1.

<sup>17</sup> English Heritage Archive Building File 96389.

<sup>18</sup> NHLE 1253842 - Thomas Hardy immortalised Weyhill Fair as Weydon Priors Fair in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* at which Michael Henchard is said to have sold his wife. Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 105.

<sup>19</sup> Brenda Assael, 'Sanger, George (1825?-1911)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008  
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35940> (accessed 14 August 2014).

Since the 17th century small rides powered by men or horses had appeared at some fairs.<sup>20</sup> The logical technological step was to apply steam power to these rides and by the 1860s firms involved in the production of farm machinery were beginning to do this.<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, the internal combustion engine and electricity further transformed fairgrounds, allowing larger, faster and more brilliantly illuminated rides. This new technology required significant investment and therefore showmen increasingly concentrated on larger fairs, resulting in the decline of the smaller, traditional, village fair.<sup>22</sup> It would also lead to the creation of the earliest, purpose-built, permanent amusement sites.

A second indigenous strand in the origins of modern seaside amusement parks is the pleasure garden, a phenomenon that can ultimately trace its roots back to the pleasure gardens of medieval monarchs.<sup>23</sup> The earliest public pleasure garden had been created in London during the 17th century. New Spring Gardens, later called Vauxhall Gardens, opened soon after the Restoration and by the 18th century London was said to be home to more than 60.<sup>24</sup> Pleasure gardens offered their paying customers musical performances, fireworks and at the end of the 18th century even balloon ascents, the ultimate novelty ride.<sup>25</sup> The pleasure gardens of London were the inspiration for similar institutions in major provincial towns and at seaside resorts. One of the earliest was at Margate where the remains of the medieval Dent-de-Lion fortified house at nearby Garlinge became a destination for visitors by the late 18th century. Margate's Tivoli Gardens opened in 1829 providing a spacious park with a concert hall, a bowling green, an archery ground, refreshment rooms, arbours, Swiss cottages and sequestered walks.<sup>26</sup> At Broadstairs the Ranelagh Gardens at St Peter's was designed as a replica of the Tivoli Gardens as well as seeking to emulate its metropolitan

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<sup>20</sup> Ian Starsmore, *English Fairs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p.16.

<sup>21</sup> Starsmore, *English Fairs*, pp. 46-9; Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980), p. 174; Peter Wilkes, *Fairground Heritage* (Burton-upon-Trent: Trent Valley Publications, 1, 1989), pp. 42, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 174; Wilkes, *Fairground Heritage*, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> John Harvey, *Medieval Gardens* (London: BT Batsford & Co, 1981), p. 106; E. Jamieson and R. Lane, 'Monuments, Mobility and Medieval Perceptions of Designed Landscapes: The Pleasance, Kenilworth.' *Medieval Archaeology*, **59** [2015] forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> T. J. Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens* (New Haven: Yale, 1983), p. 11. Jeremy Black, *A Subject for Taste* (London: Hambledon, 2005), p. 198; Mollie Sands, *The Eighteenth-Century Pleasure Gardens of Marylebone* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1987), p. 11; Sarah Jane Downing, *The English Pleasure Garden 1660-1860* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2009), p. 11; David Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens A History* (New Haven: Yale, 2011), p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 95. Charles Dickens witnessed balloon ascents in Vauxhall Gardens: Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (London: MacMillan, 1958), pp. 120-1. A balloon ascent still takes place near the seafront at Bournemouth: <http://www.bournemouthballoon.com/> (accessed 14 August 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Malcolm Morley, *Margate and its theatres, 1730-1965* (London: Museum Press, 1966), p. 52; G. E. Clarke, *Historic Margate* (Margate: Margate Public Library, 1975), p. 51.



namesake.<sup>27</sup> Unusually, some of the buildings of this pleasure garden have survived and are listed.<sup>28</sup>

The pleasure gardens at Margate were in decline by the late 19th century, but in the 1860s Blackpool was beginning to provide its visitors with pleasure grounds. Belle Vue Gardens was created as an inland destination for visitors and in the early 1870s a larger, more modern rival opened nearby. Raikes Hall Gardens opened for its first full season in 1872 and provided its customers with firework displays, circus acts, dancing, acrobats and a range of other lively spectacles.<sup>29</sup> The gardens contained a substantial conservatory filled with exotic plants, ferns and flowers, as well as a Grand Pavilion capable of accommodating 10,000 people and a dancing platform that catered for 4,000 people.<sup>30</sup> During the next 25 years a series of new attractions were added including a tricycle track, a camera obscura and a switchback railway.<sup>31</sup> Raikes Hall Gardens was in effect a proto-amusement park, a few miles from where Blackpool Pleasure Beach would develop in the next few years.

The amusement park was also inspired by early national and international exhibitions and many early switchbacks, scenic railways and figures of eight were originally located at short-lived exhibition sites before being transferred to amusement parks. In London the most important exhibition was the Great Exhibition in 1851, which did not feature amusements, but exhibitions at Earl's Court, Kensington's Olympia and Shepherd's Bush's White City all had areas containing amusements. It needs to be remembered that the seaside entertainment structures that do survive thus stand for a far greater number of ephemeral buildings and rides, which lends them an extra layer of importance.

While some of the strands behind the origins and the popularity of amusement parks is indigenous to Britain, the most immediate and direct debt was to developments taking place across the Atlantic at Coney Island in Brooklyn (New York), where the earliest amusement parks were established from the mid-1890s onwards. In 1895 Captain Paul Boyton opened Sea Lion Park, the first enclosed amusement park with an admission fee.<sup>32</sup> By the early 20th century three vast parks lit by hundreds of thousands light bulbs had been

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<sup>27</sup> Morley, *Margate and its theatres, 1730-1965*, p. 55. The gardens included a chance to see imported natives from Patagonia in their natural habitat!

<sup>28</sup> NHLE 1222837, 1222976, 1223056, 1267679.

<sup>29</sup> John K. Walton, *Blackpool* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 88.

<sup>30</sup> Blackpool Gazette and News 30 May 1873, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> The 1893 Ordnance Survey map shows the substantial facilities available at the renamed Royal Palace Gardens. The much smaller Belle Vue Gardens appear a short distance to the east.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Cartmell, *The Incredible Scream Machine* (Ohio: Amusement Park Books, 1987), p. 66; Mark Wyatt, *White Knuckle Ride* (London: Salamander, 1996), p. 13; Gary S. Cross, and John K. Walton, *The Playful Crowd Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 39.

built along the seafront; Steeplechase (opened in 1897), Luna Park built on the site of Boyton's first, unsuccessful park (1903) and Dreamland (1904).<sup>33</sup> Today Coney Island no longer glitters so brightly, but the footprints of the parks are still evident. The Cyclone, a wooden rollercoaster of 1927, still operates and is rated by enthusiasts as one of the greatest rides in the world. It is also a protected monument, one of a handful of fairground rides to have been afforded this recognition in America.<sup>34</sup>

Having examined the origins of amusement parks, the research examined how Blackpool Pleasure Beach served as a blueprint for amusement parks in Britain. The site of Britain's first enclosed seaside amusement park evolved from the mid-1890s onwards on a stretch of the shoreline to the south of the Victoria Pier, an area occupied by a gypsy encampment. The first attractions in this area were small-scale rides including a Hotchkiss Railroad Bicycle Ride, as well as fairground booths and stalls.<sup>35</sup> These were created as concessions on plots of land in the dunes and the title of 'The Pleasure Beach' only began to appear in advertisements in 1905, indicating that the process of consolidating the ownership of the plots and rides was under way.<sup>36</sup> Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machine of 1904 and the River Caves of the following year both survive today, relics from the time immediately before the park was formed.

Blackpool Pleasure Beach served as an inspiration and a model for other seaside amusement parks, most of which have now closed or have lost their historic rides. The Kursaal at Southend-on-Sea opened in July 1901, with gardens, amusements, a cycle track, a café and a menagerie and circus.<sup>37</sup> The site changed ownership in 1910 and became Luna Park with the Harton Scenic Railway and a Figure of Eight coaster, a miniature railway, Astley's Circus and a cinema.<sup>38</sup> The public face of the Kursaal was a large, red-brick structure with ashlar detailing and it was dominated the tall, Wrennaissance-style dome. There was a plan to erect a 530ft high tower, but this was never built. Frontierland at Morecambe opened in 1909, when it was called the West End Amusement Park. The only remnant today of the park is the Polo Mint

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<sup>33</sup> David Bennett, *Roller Coaster* (London: Aurum, 1998), pp. 19-21; Cartmell, *The Incredible Scream Machine*, p. 66; Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd*, pp. 39-42.

<sup>34</sup> NRHP (National Register Historic Places) 91000907.

<sup>35</sup> John K. Walton, *Riding on Rainbows* (St Albans: Skelter Publishing, 2007), pp. 21-2.

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, *Roller Coaster*, p. 23; Robert E. Preedy, *Roller Coasters – their amazing history* (Leeds: Robert E. Preedy, 1992), p. 8; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, pp. 16ff; Josephine Kane, 'A Whirl of Wonder!' *British Amusement Parks and the Architecture of Pleasure 1900-1939* (PhD thesis, The Bartlett, UCL, University of London, 2007), pp. 74-5; Vanessa Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach* (Hathersage: Boco, 2011), pp. 11, 15; Josephine Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure: British Amusement Parks and the Architecture of Pleasure 1900-1939* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 31-2.

<sup>37</sup> Ken Crowe, *Kursaal Memories A History of Southend's Amusement Park* (St Albans: Skelter Publishing, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Kane, 'A Whirl of Wonder!', pp. 108-10; Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure*, p. 63.

tower, which was the Space Tower at Blackpool Pleasure Beach, a 150-foot (46 m) gyro tower that had to be removed to make way for the Big One rollercoaster.<sup>39</sup> Pleasureland at Southport has been operating since 1913, when it opened with a figure of eight rollercoaster and a slide.<sup>40</sup> The park, which closed in 2006, included several historical rides, including the Cyclone. Erected in 1937, this structure had undergone some previous losses, but was substantially intact in September 2007, when requests for listing reached English Heritage. By the time an official site visit took place, the structure lay in pieces: 'one of the most shocking closures in recent years'.<sup>41</sup> **Fig 4**

Apart from Blackpool Pleasure Beach, the most famous seaside amusement park is Dreamland at Margate. It had been the location for the Hall-by-the-Sea entertainment complex since the 1860s and by the 1870s was the winter base for Sanger's menagerie. During the late 19th century he developed the land to include ornamental pleasure gardens, a small lake, a 'ruined abbey' folly and a roller skating rink.<sup>42</sup>

At the end of 1919 the site was sold to John Henry Iles (1871–1951) who was marketing rollercoasters for LA Thompson's Scenic Railway Company in Britain and Europe. It opened again in April 1920 with an amusement park and cinema and was called Dreamland, to evoke some of the glamour of Coney Island.<sup>43</sup> During the 1920s Charles Palmer, a local architect, improved the park's appearance by replacing lightweight, wooden structures with a unified scheme in brick and concrete, a programme that anticipated Emberton's comprehensive revision of Blackpool Pleasure Beach.<sup>44</sup> In 1935 the present Dreamland Cinema was opened and contained a 2,200 seat auditorium and a multi-entertainment complex.<sup>45</sup> First listed in 1992, it was upgraded to Grade II\* in 2007, despite having undergone some losses and changes, such as sub-division of the auditorium. This was in recognition of its architectural quality, the importance of the sculpted decoration by Eric Aumonier, and its overall contribution to the Dreamland complex. Dreamland closed during 2006 after decades of changing ownership, under-investment and declining visitor numbers. By this time all the fixed rides, with the exception of the Scenic Railway, had been removed.

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<sup>39</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frontierland,\\_Morecambe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frontierland,_Morecambe) (accessed 14 August 2014)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.joylandbooks.com/themagicseye/articles/goinggoinggone.htm> (accessed 14 August 2014); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasureland\\_Southport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasureland_Southport) (accessed 14 August 2014) says it opened in 1912.

<sup>41</sup> Anya Chapman, 'Coasters at the Coast', *Context* (130, July 2013), pp. 18-20, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> R. V. J. Butt, *The Directory of Railway Stations* (Sparkford: PSL Ltd, 1995), p. 155; R. Clements, *Margate in Old Photographs* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992), p. 125; Nick Evans, *Dreamland Remembered* (Whitstable: Bygone Publishing, 2009), pp. 5-6.

<sup>43</sup> Evans, *Dreamland Remembered*, pp. 11-14; Morley, *Margate and its theatres*, p. 137.

<sup>44</sup> Kane, 'A Whirl of Wonder!', p. 195; Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure*, p. 171.

<sup>45</sup> Evans, *Dreamland Remembered*, pp. 31-5; Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure*, p. 197; Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure*, p. 172.

Seaside amusement parks have been in a serious decline in England, with Blackpool, Great Yarmouth and Southport (reopened) being the only traditional parks that have remained open. There are also some modern parks, such as the large Fantasy Island at Ingoldmells and the Brean Leisure Park near Weston-super-Mare. In recent years there has also been a trend towards providing smaller parks nearer the heart of resorts such as at Scarborough beside the harbour or near the pier at Southend-at-Sea. In large towns and cities urban amusement parks have also been in decline. Instead, today the majority of the larger amusement park sites are at inland parks, on country house estates that sought to diversify to increase their income. These include Alton Towers, whose elaborate gardens opened to the public in 1860.<sup>46</sup> During World War II it was requisitioned by the military and remained closed to the public until 1951 when fairground attractions were first provided. From 1973 the estate was run as an amusement park and in 2010 attracted 2.6 million visitors.<sup>47</sup> Drayton Manor Park at Tamworth, which was Sir Robert Peel's home, became 'Drayton Manor Park and Zoo' in the 1970s and in the 1980s became a theme park.<sup>48</sup> Chessington World of Adventures had different origins; it began as a zoo in 1931 and became one of Britain's first theme parks in the mid-1980s.<sup>49</sup>

Fairground rides were not restricted to amusement parks during the 19th and 20th centuries and there were many examples of single rides set up on seafronts or on any convenient piece of land. A story in an 1823 magazine includes an early reference at Margate to a slide called the Russian Mountains near the harbour and an advertisement in October 1823 announced that a Montagne Russe at Sadler's Wells would soon be closing.<sup>50</sup> At Blackpool the 1893 Ordnance Survey map shows a switchback near the Central Pier and another existed to the north of Blackpool at Uncle Tom's Cabin. At the Winter Gardens a large Ferris wheel opened in 1896 and this remained an iconic feature of Blackpool until it was dismantled in the late 1920s.<sup>51</sup> At Folkestone a switchback was erected on the beach in 1888, but

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<sup>46</sup> Deborah Philips, *Fairground Attractions A Genealogy of the Pleasure Ground* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), pp. 14-15; NHLE 1374685.

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[http://www.aecom.com/deployedfiles/Internet/Capabilities/Economics/\\_documents/Theme%20Index%202011.pdf](http://www.aecom.com/deployedfiles/Internet/Capabilities/Economics/_documents/Theme%20Index%202011.pdf) (accessed 14 August 2014)

<sup>48</sup> John Prest, 'Peel, Sir Robert, second baronet (1788–1850)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21764> (accessed 14 August 2014); Deborah Philips, *Fairground Attractions A Genealogy of the Pleasure Ground* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chessington\\_World\\_of\\_Adventures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chessington_World_of_Adventures) (accessed 14 August 2014).

<sup>50</sup> A Cockney, 'A Week's Journal at Margate' *The Mirror* (1823), pp. 373-5, p. 375. Morning Chronicle - 3 October 1823, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Bill Curtis, *Blackpool Tower* (Lavenham: Dalton, 1988), p. 31.

succumbed in 1919-20 to a major fire.<sup>52</sup> Piers might also contain rides, such as the switchback filling most of the deck of Ramsgate Pier, which operated from 1888 until 1891.<sup>53</sup> Birnbeck Pier at Weston-super-Mare offered its customers swings in 1876 and by the early 20th century it had a switchback, a water chute, a helter skelter and a short-lived flying machine. Constructing so many entertainment facilities was possible as the pier included an island in its structure.<sup>54</sup>

## 2 The 20th century heritage of entertainment: survival and losses

Having reviewed the background to the origins of amusement parks, and assessed the form of the modern amusement park market, the assessment examined what still survives today that might merit heritage protection measures by English Heritage. The most important amusement park site in Britain and the finest collection of historic rides in the world is Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machine, the oldest ride in continuous use in the world, first operated on 1 August 1904 at Blackpool and therefore predates the foundation of the Pleasure Beach.<sup>55</sup> Devised in 1902, it was first shown at the Earls Court exhibition in 1903 and was rebuilt at Blackpool.<sup>56</sup> It consists of ten steel arms, from which cables hang to support cars originally in the shape of boats and these rotate around a central 30m high vertical driving shaft, allowing the cars to fan outwards as they turned, achieving what was once a terrifying maximum speed of 65mph.<sup>57</sup> The original gondolas were replaced in 1929 by aeroplanes and rockets replaced these in 1952, updates designed to keep the ride at the forefront of contemporary technology. In 1905 the River Caves opened.<sup>58</sup> It had become popular in 1904 in America and had come to England first at Earl's Court. The ride consisted of boats passing through 'caverns' with tableaux lit by electric lights. The ride has survived though the interiors have been updated. Other pre-1914 rides have not alas survived. In 1907 John Henry Iles, who later founded Dreamland, erected the Scenic Railway, which he continued to own until his bankruptcy in 1919.<sup>59</sup> A

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<sup>52</sup> Martin Easdown, *Piers of Kent* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2007), p. 110.

<sup>53</sup> Easdown, *Piers of Kent*, p. 76.

<sup>54</sup> Anthony Wills and Tim Phillips, *British Seaside Piers* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2014), pp. 246-252.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Bennett, *A Century of Fun* (Blackpool Pleasure Beach, 1996), pp. 19-21.

<sup>56</sup> Kane, 'A Whirl of Wonder!', p. 62; Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure*, pp. 40, 85.

<sup>57</sup> Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 29; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> Dave Russell, 'Iles, (John) Henry (1871-1951)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48777> (accessed 12 April 2013); Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 24.

65ft high water chute was also erected in 1907, propelling 55 boats per hour, each with their own gondolier, down a 267ft long chute.<sup>60</sup> In 1909 the Velvet Coaster was built by William H. Strickler. It remained in use until 1932 when it was dismantled, though elements of it were incorporated into the Roller Coaster of 1933.<sup>61</sup>

The programme of providing new rides for the Pleasure Beach continued during the inter-war years and a few have survived. Noah's Ark was also constructed by Strickler, allowing visitors to take a trip to Mount Ararat, walking past animals on moving platforms with a rocking motion to simulate the sea voyage.<sup>62</sup> It survives today, with renewed animals, and is a key feature near the main entrance to the park. The Big Dipper, the first example of which appeared in New Jersey in 1920, was designed by the leading rollercoaster engineer John A Miller, and was added to the Pleasure Beach in 1923 by Strickler.<sup>63</sup> By the mid-1930s extra land was available to the south of the Pleasure Beach and so the Big Dipper was lengthened and rearranged by the American engineer Charles Paige in 1936, while the new station was created by Joseph Emberton. In 1933 Paige oversaw the construction of the Roller Coaster (now the vibrant-orange Nickelodeon Streak), reusing the lift hill and other parts of the Velvet Coaster.<sup>64</sup> In 1934 the Little Dipper (later known as the Zipper Dipper, now the Blue Flyer) was built and a year later Paige working with Harry G Traver built the Grand National, a ride inspired by Travers' Cyclone at Long Beach (California).<sup>65</sup> In total Paige is known to have been responsible for thirteen wooden rollercoasters, but the rides at Blackpool are his only creations that are still in operation.<sup>66</sup>

As well as importing rides and ride technology, the idea of a visual theme for the park seems to have been influenced by American parks. In 1931 the Philadelphia architect Edward Schoeppe designed a new frontage to the park, including the 600-seat News Theatre, as well as the front of the Velvet Coaster and a new frontage for Howell's Photographic Studio, which he wittily

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<sup>60</sup> Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, p. 23; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 30

<sup>61</sup> Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, p. 31; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 33; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 25. The Roller Coaster has subsequently become the Nickelodeon Streak.

<sup>62</sup> Kane, 'A Whirl of Wonder!', p. 172; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, pp. 47-9; Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure*, p. 147. Strickler also oversaw the construction of Noah's Arks at Morecambe and Southport in 1930, Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, p. 45; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, pp. 47, 50; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 33; Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure*, p. 148. See Miller's work in section on rollercoasters.

<sup>64</sup> Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, p. 63; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 61.

<sup>65</sup> Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, p. 65; Bennett, *Roller Coaster*, p. 40; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 64; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, pp. 43, 127

<sup>66</sup> <http://rcdb.com/r.htm?ot=2&pe=6939> (accessed 14 August 2014).

designed to resemble a camera.<sup>67</sup> Beginning in 1933, and continuing until the outbreak of the Second World War, the British architect Joseph Emberton was employed to give the park an overall visual unity, which involved creating more modernist structures and gave existing rides a Moderne facelift.<sup>68</sup> **Fig 3**

Since World War II Blackpool Pleasure Beach has updated its offer to its customers with new rides and attractions being squeezed in alongside many favourite historic rides to create an increasingly complex entertainment landscape. The major post-war steps in the creation of this modern wonderland began with the creation of the last wooden rollercoaster, the Wild Mouse, in 1958 and the fast carousel, the Derby racer in the following year.<sup>69</sup> They were followed in 1967 by the Log Flume, which was 50ft high and almost 2,350ft long making it the longest outside the USA.<sup>70</sup> The Steeplechase was opened in 1977 by Red Rum and two years later the Revolution was created, a steel shuttle rollercoaster that provides a looping ride on its outward and return journey. The Avalanche, which opened in 1988, is a steel bobsled rollercoaster, the first of its kind in Britain, but all these were literally overshadowed by the 1994 Pepsi Max Big One, now the Big One. It was designed by Ron Toomer of Arrow Dynamics and is 235ft high, one mile long and reaches a maximum speed of 74mph.<sup>71</sup> In 2000 Valhalla, the World's largest indoor ride, opened combining a white knuckle ride with special effects creating the appearance of fire, water, snow, thunder and lightning.<sup>72</sup> What is remarkable about the Pleasure Beach is the ingenuity of its designers and the foresight of its management to realise new attractions while retaining the best of the park's historic rides.

In addition to Blackpool and Margate, another pre-World War II rollercoaster survives at Great Yarmouth. The first amusement ride, a LA Thompson Switchback Railway, was erected in Great Yarmouth on the seafront in 1887 and remained there until the early 20th century.<sup>73</sup> In 1909 the Pleasure Beach was established and included a Scenic Railway set within a plaster mountainous terrain, though it was destroyed by fire in 1919 but rebuilt quickly. An Aerofilms photograph of 1920 shows the scenic railway devoid of

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<sup>67</sup> Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, pp. 58-9; Kane, 'A Whirl of Wonder!', p. 176; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 39; Kane, *The Architecture of Pleasure*, pp. 150-1

<sup>68</sup> Alan Powers, 'Emberton, Joseph (1889–1956)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37396> (accessed 14 August 2014); Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, pp. 61-2; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, pp. 91-2; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 82.

<sup>70</sup> Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, p. 98; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 97.

<sup>71</sup> Bennett, *A Century of Fun*, pp. 129ff; Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, pp. 112-5; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 133.

<sup>72</sup> Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 114; Toulmin, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, p. 102.

<sup>73</sup> Edward Goate 'The Old Switchback and the Hotchkiss Bicycle Railway' in *Yarmouth Archaeology* 1994, 17-19; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Yarmouth\\_Pleasure\\_Beach](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Yarmouth_Pleasure_Beach) (accessed 14 August 2014).

any scenery, standing alone on the sand.<sup>74</sup> In 1928 the lease of the Scenic Railway ended and the ride was transferred to Aberdeen. A new Scenic Railway was purchased from Paris and opened in 1932 with an alpine landscape and castles entertaining riders on the circuit. The ride was reclad in the 1960s and is the only operational scenic railway in Britain.

As well as historic rides surviving in amusement parks a number of towns have parks that include small rides such as miniature railways and water chutes. Charles Wicksteed, the founder of Wicksteed Park at Kettering, created a 30 acre lake in 1921 and later designed and built one of the earliest surviving water-based rides in the world, the 'Waterchute', which opened in 1926.<sup>75</sup> It plunges the occupants of a boat down a ramp into the water at speed. The example in East Park at Kingston-upon-Hull was designed and made in 1929 by Messrs Charles Wicksteed and Co Ltd and erected by the City Council's Engineer's Department.<sup>76</sup> A third example survives in Peasholme Park in Scarborough. Only the ride at Hull is listed, though all three are in a similar state of survival and of a similar date.

The tradition of single rides in prominent locations continues at seaside resorts. On the Promenade at Southport, at the landward end of the pier, a set of restored gallopers has become a semi-permanent feature of the resort's seafront and a number of resorts, as well as inland towns and cities have been the host for large Ferris or observation wheels, a phenomenon stimulated by the success of the London Eye.

Today some seaside piers are also the home to fairground rides. With limited space available these are often aimed at younger riders, but Blackpool's South Pier offers the Sky Coaster and the Sky Screamer, rides that catapult the bravest high into the sky.

### 3 England's amusement park heritage: an international comparison

Blackpool Pleasure Beach contains a unique collection of early rides; nowhere else in the world so clearly reflects the past 120 years of amusement parks and the evolution of rollercoaster and fairground ride technology. It has an unrivalled heritage of pre-1939 fairground rides stretching from Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machine (1904) and the River Caves (1905) to the Big Dipper (1923), the Roller Coaster (now the Nickelodeon Streak 1933), the

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<sup>74</sup> Aerofilms Collection in English Heritage Archive photograph EPW001875.

<sup>75</sup> <http://wicksteedpark.org/rides/> (accessed 14 August 2014).

<sup>76</sup> NHLE 1390517. The company, now named Wicksteed Leisure Limited, is still a manufacturer of children's playground equipment. <http://www.wicksteed.co.uk/> (accessed 14 August 2014).



Little Dipper (now the Blue Flyer 'kiddie coaster' (1934) and the Grand National (1935), Britain's only surviving historic twin-track rollercoaster.<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere Margate still has the remains of its 1920 Scenic Railway and at Great Yarmouth Pleasure Beach visitors can still ride its Scenic Railway of 1932. In addition there are three water splash rides in municipal parks and there is the remains of the Aerial Glide Static Fairground Ride in Shipley Glen Amusement Park at Baildon, which was once designated, but has now been delisted. It was apparently an early steel-framed ride of c. 1900, steel being needed as it was ride from which riders were suspended. However, it was subsequently delisted when it was suggested that the frame was a later replacement.

Although Britain has a rich amusement heritage, this is only a tiny fraction of the dozens of rides that once existed. Trawling through various sources it is possible to make rough estimates of the numbers that once existed, though there are undoubtedly some that may have been missed.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, there seem to have been 31 switchback railways, though three of these were dismantled and relocated to new locations. None survive today anywhere in the world and the last example in Britain was demolished in the 1930s. There were 38 side-friction rollercoasters and 34 Figure of Eight rides. While none of these survive the side-friction technology used in Scenic Railways can still be enjoyed at Great Yarmouth and will again be appreciated at Margate, as two of Britain's 31 examples have survived.

Britain's earliest rollercoaster is the Scenic Railway at Margate dating from 1920, meaning that it is the sixth equal oldest surviving ride in the world, along with the Jack Rabbit at Kennywood, West Mifflin (Pennsylvania). The oldest ride still in use is the 1902 side-friction Leap the Dips at Lakemont Park, Altoona (Pennsylvania) while the oldest scenic railway, and the oldest rollercoaster which has been in use continuously is at Luna Park in Melbourne, Australia. It dates from 1912 while Europe's oldest rollercoaster ride is the Rutschebanen at Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, which still has mountain scenery surrounding the coaster. In total 35 rollercoasters have survived from before 1939, 23 in USA and six in Britain, including four at Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

The average life span of rollercoasters and fairground rides seems to lie between 20 and 40 years, but some have passed their 100th birthday and Margate's Scenic Railway should hopefully be thrilling thousands of visitors

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<sup>77</sup> *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*, Saturday 18 August 1888, p. 5; Keith Parry, *Resorts of the Lancashire Coast* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1983), pp. 146-52; Preedy, *Roller Coasters*, p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> Among these is <http://rcdb.com/> (accessed 14 August 2014) and unpublished research carried out by Nick Laister.

when its centenary occurs in 2020! However, at Blackpool Pleasure Beach Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machine (1904) and the River Caves (1905) are both over a century old, and still popular, while there are four rollercoasters dating from the 1920s and 1930s. However, a number of historic rides have been lost in recent years. The Whip, a waltzer-type ride of 1921 was removed in 2005, the Junior Whip lasted from 1927 to 2008 and the Turtle Chase of 1935, a tumble bug type ride was closed in 2006. A fire in 1991 destroyed Joseph Emberton's Fun House, highlighting the vulnerability of historic rides and attractions to fire damage.

### **The Heritage of Entertainment – the challenge of retention**

Historic amusement park rides are rare survivors and face significant threats. Potentially most destructive is the risk of fire damage, as these often fragile structures were usually constructed of wood. An 1888 switchback on the beach at Folkestone succumbed spectacularly to a major fire in 1919 or 1920 and Dreamland at Margate has suffered a number of fires during its history.<sup>79</sup> In 2008, two years after its closure, there was a suspicious fire that destroyed the lift hill and engine shed of the Scenic Railway. In addition, all fairground rides will have been subject to programme of maintenance and repair to guarantee their survival. This is especially the case with timber structures and this has inevitably led to the loss of original, historic fabric. Despite comprehensive and regular maintenance programmes, they must inevitably have a limited lifespan as rides because their structure begins to be beyond economic repair and they may become unsafe as their fabric ages and regulations become stricter. In addition, some have had their appearance updated to respond to changes in public tastes. The customers flying on Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machine in 1904 were transported in gondolas, which were replaced in 1929 by aeroplanes and in turn by rockets in 1952. The technology of rides developed rapidly during the 20th century rendering may older rides old fashioned and potentially less popular. However, age also confers a certain nostalgic value to rides and historic rides once aimed at thrill-seeking adults have been successfully re-imagined as fun rides for the family. Blackpool Pleasure Beach's rich heritage of rollercoasters and other early attractions demonstrate that this policy can be a success.

Although they are well-loved by the public and are recognised by the management of the Pleasure Beach as a key part of what makes the Pleasure Beach special, none of these rides currently have any statutory protection. As long as the Pleasure Beach remains popular and economically successful, the

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<sup>79</sup> Easdown, *Piers of Kent*, p. 110; Kane, 'A Whirl of Wonder!', p. 199, Evans, *Dreamland Remembered*, pp. 53-4.

future of these rides should be secure, but if there is a belief that a new ride would increase visitor numbers, even at the cost of an historic ride, these could be lost without any consultation with the public, local authority or English Heritage. Listing is a mandatory duty: if special architectural or historic interest is present, then the Secretary of State has a duty, not the option, to add the building to the list. Thankfully, designation is just the start of a conversation about the management of an asset, and not the petrifying closure of discussion which misinformed opinion sometimes mistakes it for.

Historic fairground rides are also vulnerable to a more strategic level threat, when a park no longer proves popular and therefore is not economically viable. In larger, older resorts many historic amusement parks have closed in recent years, including Morecambe (Frontierland closed 1999), Whitley Bay (Spanish City 2000), Margate (Dreamland 2006), Folkestone (last ride demolished 2007) and Rhyl (Ocean Beach 2007). This decline in the popularity of seaside amusement parks has been caused by lower numbers of visitors at the seaside, but also because there have been major developments at inland parks that are now more exciting, more modern and more conveniently located for large population centres. Alton Towers is ideally located for the conurbations in Midlands, Lancashire and Yorkshire, while Legoland and Chessington World of Adventures successfully serve London and the south-east.

## **Conclusion**

Four rides in the USA enjoy statutory protection by being on the National Register of Historic Places. In California the 1925 Mission Beach 'Giant Dipper' rollercoaster at Belmont Park San Diego and the 1911 Loeff Carousell and 1924 'Giant Dipper' rollercoaster on the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk are both designated.<sup>80</sup> The most famous and most celebrated roller coaster is the 1927 Cyclone Roller Coaster at Coney Island, which is claimed by enthusiasts of the rollercoaster to be the greatest ride in the world.<sup>81</sup>

None of the rides at Blackpool are as yet listed structures, though their designation is actively under consideration at the time of writing (October 2014), but the Scenic Railway at Dreamland in Margate now enjoys an appropriate level of Designation. The Scenic Railway is now listed at grade II\* in recognition of its special importance, despite the regular repairs that have been required to keep it running and the recent fire damage. The survival of the Scenic Railway has prompted plans for a heritage amusement park that

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<sup>80</sup> NRHP 78000753 <http://rcdb.com/203.htm> (accessed 14 August 2014); NRHP 87000764 <http://rcdb.com/204.htm> (accessed 14 August 2014).

<sup>81</sup> NRHP 91000907 <http://rcdb.com/9250.htm> (accessed 14 August 2014).

will offer visitors a range of favourite historic fairground rides collected from around the country when it begins to open in 2015.

This case alone demonstrates that there is a place for listing the architecture of fun. If pleasure is to be taken seriously, its history has to be captured and celebrated. If an understanding of seaside and fairground heritage can be a major contributor to the renaissance of the English seaside, then there is a need to identify the components of this legacy, and, where appropriate, deliver protection through designation. It is unlikely that many more such structures will be added to the NHLE, but there is a need to ensure that the most important survivors gain the recognition that listing bestows: designation is a celebration of special interest, as well as a tool in the planning system for careful management. And with governmental encouragement of the identification of local heritage assets, there is no reason why other levels of protection cannot be bestowed as well. Designation in itself will not make holidaymakers line up in droves, though there are many people who would prefer historic rides to modern terror rides. However, a celebration of the special, and imaginative management of this select group, will guarantee that the best of our seaside pleasure inheritance gets every chance to see many more holiday seasons yet.

## **Figures**

- 1 Dreamland and the Scenic Railway, Margate 2007. DP032138
- 2 Witney Fair, Henry W. Taunt 1904. CC73/00569
- 3 Blackpool Pleasure Beach in the mid-20th century, Aerofilms Collection, AFL03/Lilywhites/blp45
- 4 Southport Pleasureland Cyclone 2005. DP034506