



The Violent Storm of November 1881: the new pier destroyed



The picture shows the aftermath of the near hurricane force storm that struck the south coast over the week-end of 26th-27th November 1881. It destroyed the pierhead at Ventnor just weeks after its completion. The *Times* newspaper offered a graphic account of the weather conditions when it reported that at Betteshanger in Kent the ferocity of the winds toppled 500 trees.

It was early on the Sunday morning that observers on the shore noticed that some of the timber cross ties on the new landing stage had been washed out overnight and that others were loose. The local longshoremen knew all too well the weight of water that ran off this coast during a 'sou-wester' and saw little chance that any of this new timber landing stage would survive, given the continuing force of the storm. As the timber baulks became liberated from their fixings, they were thrown against the ironwork of the pierhead proper, and its iron piles and girders were soon starting to break and fall. For what seemed an inconceivable time, a small number of piles held up the broad head of the pier with its sheltered seats and bandstand. But at about 2.20 pm, one tremendous sea wrecked what remained and the entire mass of the pierhead fell with a crashing sound that could be clearly heard above the howling storm. It tumbled over and over, eventually shattered into pieces to end up washed on to the rocks between the pier and the Gas Works.

By the time the storm had begun to subside, on the Sunday evening, all that remained of the pier was the neck, as the photograph reveals. It would be some six years or so before the pier was rebuilt. Meanwhile, the wreck timber was sold in 1882 at very beneficial prices to the pier's owners, quite a lot bought by local builders.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre.



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The Society and Heritage Centre are run and managed by volunteers.

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