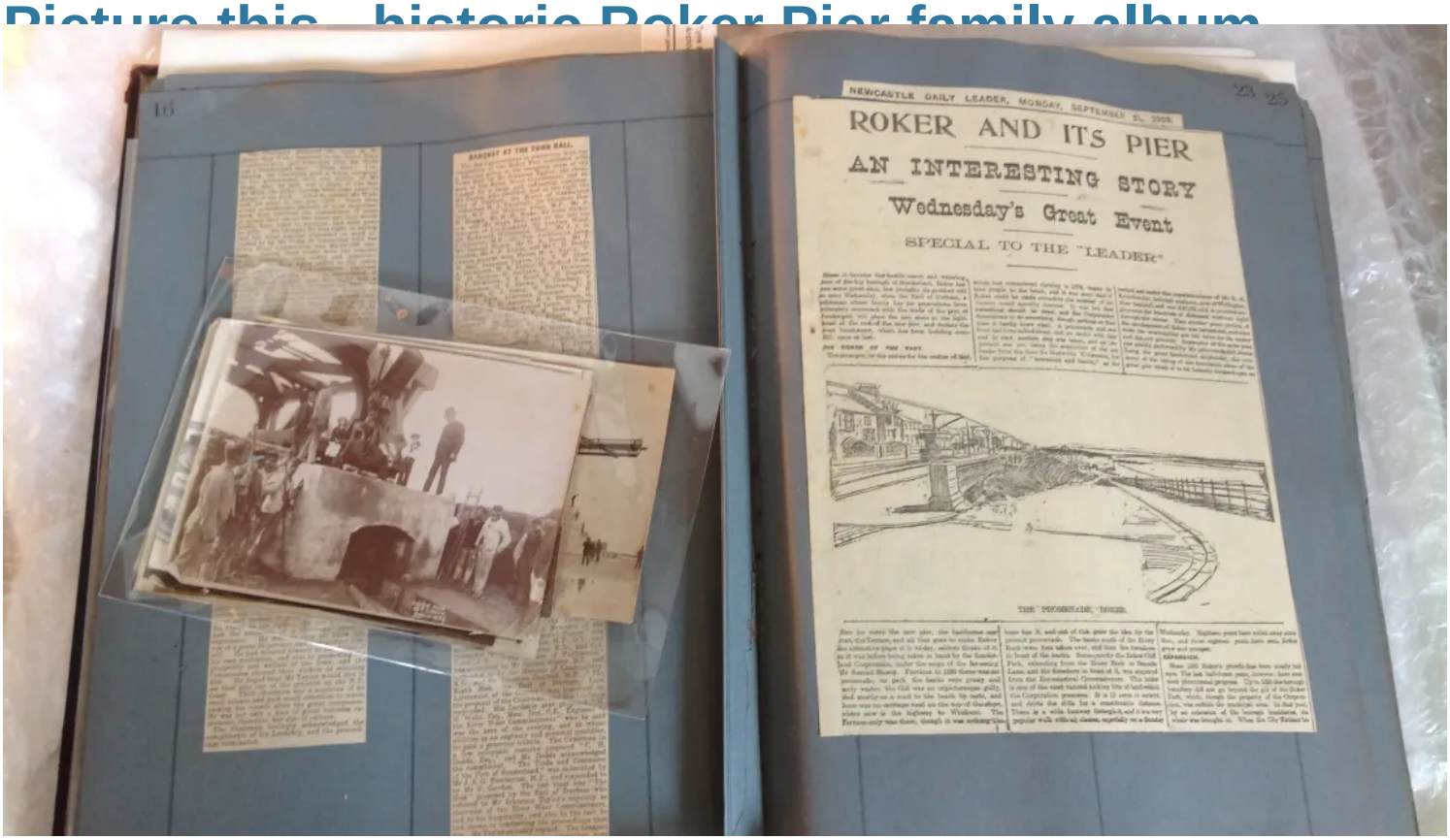
Picture this... historic Roker Pier family album



Family album depicting construction of Roker Pier

The leather bound album records key milestones in the construction of Roker Pier. It was put together by the family of Henry Hay Wake, the engineer who built the pier in the late 1890s.

At some point during the last century half of the pages were cut out of the album and travelled to Australia with Henry Hay Wake's granddaughter Verna via Trinidad, Zimbabwe, (then Rhodesia) and South Africa. The other half stayed behind with another of Henry's granddaughters and are now in the archives of the River Wear Commissioners.

Now the two are to be reunited when Carmen Higgs, the Zimbabwean born great-great-granddaughter of Henry Hay Wake, who now lives in Australia, visits the city next week.

Carmen is in Sunderland for the dedication of a plaque to mark the restoration of the iconic lighthouse following the pier's £2.15million restoration. This is taking place at 3.30pm on 23 September, the 112th anniversary of the pier opening in 1903.

On her last visit to Sunderland in 2014, she came face to face with initials carved into the pier tunnel to mark her great-grandfather Mervyn's first visit there as a child in 1891.

This time, she is bringing the missing pages from the album with her. And she plans to donate these to Sunderland City Council so that they can be reunited with the rest of the scrapbook which is currently held by Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums at the Discovery Museum.

Carmen said: "When I started researching my family history 10 years ago, I never dreamed I would one day be able to walk the same paths that my ancestors did, nor that I would even see Roker Pier. During my visit last year I discovered that the album in the archives was missing pages and I realised that my aunt had the missing pages and had been unaware that they belonged to an album. After explaining this to her, she kindly agreed to donate the missing pages to the archives to be reunited with the album, so that the history of Roker Pier and the Wakes may be preserved.

[quote=Carmen Higgs, descendent of Roker Pier engineer] "I never dreamed I would one day be able to walk the same paths that my ancestors did, nor that I would even see Roker Pier." [/quote]

"It has truly touched my family and I to be able to have this link to our family's history, and we are so grateful to Ian Smithwhite and all the team at the Sunderland City Council for their dedication to preserving Roker Pier and the legacy of Henry Hay Wake for generations to come. The Wake Family and Roker Pier are an integral part of Sunderland's history, and the missing pages of the album belong in the Tyne and Wear Archives where they will be reunited with the other album pages, preserved and valued, and viewed by generations to come."

Welcoming the donation, Cabinet Secretary, Councillor Mel Speding, said: "We're delighted Carmen has been able to make the return journey to see how work is progressing on the pier and with her very kind donation. It's wonderful to think that after all those years apart, the missing pages from this historic album are to be reunited with the original. The last time Carmen was here in 2014, we had just completed the restoration of the lantern house at the top of the lighthouse and were in the process of developing a detailed bid to HLF.

"Since then, we've resurfaced the entire length of the pier for the first time in its history, and we're nearing completion of a £545,000 project to restore the lighthouse and tunnel to their former glory with the help of HLF support. So we're hoping she'll be impressed with the progress we've made. We still have a little way to go before we can fully re-open the pier to the public, but we're now at the stage where completion is in sight and working with Roker Heritage Group we hope to be able to start tours of the lighthouse and the tunnel from next summer."

The dedication plaque is being laid by the Mayor of Sunderland, Councillor Barry Curran. Cllr Curran, who is also a local ward councillor, said: "Roker Pier is a triumph of Victorian engineering and the lighthouse stands as a monument to the skills, craftsmanship and vision of the people of Sunderland. We've spent the last two and a half years working to conserve, restore and open the lighthouse to the public for the first time in its 112 year history and we're really excited that with the help of the community group we're working with to deliver this, we should be in a position to do that from next summer.

"There's no doubt that Roker Pier is one of the city's best loved landmarks and people have been really positive about its restoration. We've had so many people coming forward with interesting information and photos of the pier along with stories of their families' involement with it over the years and we hope to put these to good use in the exhibition space we are going to be setting up at the Beachouse opposite the entrance to the Pier."

Chris Mullin, Chair of HLF North East Committee, said: "Roker Pier is one of Sunderland's best known landmarks. This project marks the restoration of another important piece of the City's Victorian heritage and I am delighted that HLF has

been able to play a part in returning it to its former glory."

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: “We are delighted that this project has helped to uncover such a wonderful record of the beginnings of a much-loved landmark which played a crucial role in shaping the area we know today. Not only does it provide an invaluable way for the local community to explore its heritage but it also reveals an important part of the Wake family’s fascinating story. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players we’re proud to support this project and look forward to seeing the restoration of Roker Pier continue to succeed.”

Sadly one person who won't be at the dedication is Marilyn Stalton, the granddaughter of another of Henry Hay Wake's children, Enid. She made the trip to the pier from her Northumberland home when Carmen was last here in 2014. Regretably Marilyn, who was ill at the time has since died. But members of her family are travelling from Scotland for the dedication and are donating their family archive to the Port of Sunderland.

Further information

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