

Extract from; Sociological History of the City of Stoke-on-Trent by Ernest James Dalzell Warrilow (1910 - 2000) (Etruscan Publications 1960) Chapter 11 (372 – 375) Baths and Parks

*The wellbeing of the people of Stoke-on-Trent is materially added to in the parks, recreation grounds and baths of the six towns, a need which became fully realised at the beginning of the twentieth century. Long before this however the need for public baths had been recognised.*

*A bath, other than the then large zinc household type; was seldom to be found in working-class homes. Today, a bathroom in working-class homes is quite commonplace. So " Public Baths for the Working Classes " used to be found in various parts of the Pottery towns.*

*One of the earliest records of these baths is mentioned in the Potteries Mercury, of July, 1824, in an advertisement in which " The inhabitants of Burslem .... are respectfully informed that the Public Bath, Burslem, at the Boycers; is open to the Public." Annual subscription for families was Er is. od., for individuals ros. 6d. Non subscribers paid 6d. for each visit. The bath, which was new, could be supplied with either warm or cold water by giving half an hour's notice and the key could be had on application to James Garner, bath-keeper,, Boycers, Burslem.*

*Apart from this it was possible, towards 1850, to obtain occasional baths at local mills.*

*One of these is recalled by a one-time Mayor of Hanley, Councillor Michael Huntbach, who came to Hanley as " a raw country boy " about the year 1851 and who went every morning to the mill of Mr. Charles Adams to get a bath. The first time he jumped in " it was very cold indeed."*

*Three years later on Thursday, June 1st, 1854, the Etruria Public Swimming Bath was opened, having been built in the autumn of 1853.*

*It was announced as a Swimming and Bathing Mere and a beautiful place of resort to swimmers and bathers. This fine bath, of which no trace remains, was situated on the canal side near to Macaroni Bridge, in the valley between Etruria and Burslem, and about a quarter of a mile from the former place.*

*The site was very picturesque.*

*The bath had a feeder from the then clear Folhay, or Fowlea Brook, besides which the willow trees grew in profusion.*

*The open-air bath was 150 feet long by 60 feet broad with an area of 9,750 square feet.*

*It was surrounded by a gravel walk and had, on the side next to the canal, a high brick wall which branched into an; " undressing shed on one side and a well rolled lawn on the other."*

*It varied in depth from 2 to 7 feet with the bottom of the bath composed of layers of fine sand and gravel on a clay base.*

*A row of posts and ropes running longitudinally partitioned off a portion of the bath for the safety of those who could not swim.*

*Life buoys, belts and bladders were provided for learners and to prevent accidents.*

*A lodge was built at the entrance for the bath-keeper and construction of the baths was supervised by Mr. J. S. Forbes, architect, of Etruria.*

*The baths, which must have been extraordinary to the district, were open throughout the week from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. at a fee of 1d. plus  $\frac{1}{2}$ d., extra for a towel.*

*For men annual tickets cost 5s. each.*

*During the year of the opening, hot, cold and private shower baths were added for men and women.*

*The walk to the baths was a noted one in those days.*

*The baths were regarded as "one of the luxuries of life."*

*In addition swimming sports were held from time to time and in August, 1858, Samuel Potts, a working man of Hanley, swam "fully two miles in less than three-quarters of an hour and challenged all comers to a still greater length!" Truly "Mr. Myatts' swimming pond" at Etruria must have been a luxury for swimmers in the Potteries.*

*How and why the swimming bath fell into disuse and disappeared is not known, but one suspects that subsidence may have played an important part.*

*Eastwood Baths, Hanley, were opened in 1850.*

*These were public baths opened by the proprietors of the Eastwood Mills.*

*Hot and cold water was available in individual baths and there was in addition a large swimming bath.*

*About the year 1860 the idea of indoor baths for the Potteries was considered, and at Stoke bazaars and other functions were being held in aid of funds for their construction.*

*These baths were opened on Tuesday, May 8th, 1860, and up to the Thursday night of that week 211 persons had used the swimming baths, which had a temperature of 54 degrees. The private baths, first and second class, had been used by 70 men and one woman.*

*The water for these baths was at first from a spring nearby, but as this was insufficient; additional water was obtained from the Staffordshire Potteries Water Works Company.*

*In 1871 The General Purposes Committee of the Hanley Town Council reported on "the proposed public baths, "Sites were available in Tontine Street, at 35s. per yard, and in High Street, at 20s. Both sites were owned by Mr. F. Bishop, who was willing to return one-tenth of the purchase money as a donation. Land was also offered near Mayer and Gladstone Street at 9s. per yard; in Church Street ("where the circus stands ") (now Roxy cinema) at 10s., and a house and lard in Lichfield Street, by the executors of the late Timothy Dimmock. Mr. Meigh's field in Old Hall Street and land in Trinity Street was also offered. It was proposed to sink a well to obtain the water as it was estimated that a quantity of - 65,000 gallons of water would need to be renewed twice weekly. The Waterworks Company were at that time required by law to supply water for public baths at a rate not exceeding 6d. per 1,000 gallons.*

*The Lichfield site was eventually chosen and the baths opened in 1873.*

*Not to be outdone Longton soon followed suit and erected baths for the town. The baths were built on ground by the railway station and their erection made such rapid progress that they were opened nine months after the foundation stone was laid.*

*The opening ceremony took place on Wednesday, July 13th, 1881. The building, which cost £8,000, was erected in the style known as Ornamental Gothic in red brick with stone facings, surmounted by a clock turret at the east end. The large bath, 70 feet long by 30 feet wide, with depths ranging from 3 feet 3 inches to 6 feet 3 inches, held 60,000 gallons of water. There was a second-class bath 55 feet by 30 feet. Private baths were also available. There was a laundry with washing machines driven by a 5 h.p. engine christened " Ethel," after the Mayoress of Longton, Ethel Holdcroft.*

*To mark the occasion of the opening a swimming display was given and an extraordinary incident took place near to the end of the programme.*

*The appearance of a "nondescript," who notwithstanding the efforts of the police stationed at the entrance of the baths succeeded in jumping, fully clothed, into the middle of the bath.*

*"His efforts at swimming or sinking being frantic in the extreme caused considerable horror and consternation." In her anxiety an old lady, seated near the side of the bath, endeavoured to save the unfortunate man by reaching out with her umbrella, but after a short struggle to effect a rescue, she, herself, fell into the bath " umbrella and all " with a loud splash. A policeman stationed in one of the ladies' galleries, seeing what was going on, called: " Stand clear!" and suddenly took a terrific dive from his elevated position into the water and a struggle ensued in the effort to save the old lady who was drowning. It was not until the " nondescript " in the water had stripped himself of his outer garments to join effectively in the now grave situation that it was realised that his initial appearance and display of drowning had been a hoax.*

*Today (1958) the public baths at Longton are in an advanced stage of decay. Because of damage caused by mining subsidence both swimming baths have been closed for many years. Cracks may be seen across the begrimed bottoms and side of the baths, the whole presenting a dirty and depressing picture. On one occasion the water in the smaller of the two baths disappeared overnight after the bath had been completely emptied for cleaning during the day and refilled. In addition the larger bath in which the galas were held leaked so badly that it also had to be closed. Thus the baths have remained empty and useless for many years and only the private baths are now in use, the staff having been reduced to a very small number.*

*Public baths were opened in Moorland Road, Burslem, almost opposite to the station, in January, 1896. Similar in construction to Longton; the building was of red brick with terra-cotta facings and cost £10,680. It contained two large baths, one 25 yards long and the other 20 yards, in addition to 16 private baths and Turkish baths. During the first year, over 25,500 men and 1,360 women, exclusive of children, went to the baths. The receipts for the year 1897-98 amounted to £403. The baths were lighted by electricity, the dynamos for which were coupled to the machinery already at the baths. Today (1958) these baths are well used.*

*Tunstall jubilee baths were opened, partly completed, in July, 1890. The swimming bath was 72 feet long by 28 feet wide and held 61,000 gallons of water.*

*The Markets Estates and Baths Committee of the City Council have been for some time considering the question of new swimming baths in the city and, in conjunction with the City Reconstruction Officer, have been seeking a suitable site. Owing to subsidence, so*

*prevalent in the six towns, this is no easy matter-quite apart from the fact that the amount of land available does not, in the main, increase.*

*A site with a frontage to Duke Street, Fenton, has been considered and at the time of writing (1958) the compulsory purchase of a site in Fenpark Road, Fenton, has been recommended. This site is still occupied (May 1959) by the derelict Rubian Art Pottery. In view of this and the state of the Longton bath it now seems certain that new baths will eventually be built in this southern area of the city.*

*Meanwhile, Hanley baths have been completely reconditioned and partly reconstructed at a cost of £10,000. This has included a new, wider balcony, widened by 18 inches. The walls have been tiled to the roof and also the old concrete sidewalks. The tiles of the baths have been treated with a special white facing to prevent leakage of water. Turkish baths, sun-ray treatment rooms, modern showers, baths and new toilet accommodation are all part of the reconstruction which is to include the second bath.*

*Particularly worthy of mention was the magnificent, tiled open-air swimming bath built by Burslem Recreations Ltd., a private company formed by the directors of Sneyd Colliery Ltd., at the top of Moorland Road, Burslem and opened to the public on Whit Monday, June 6th, 1938.*

*The bath, a combined reservoir for the colliery was the largest in the Midlands measuring 220 feet long by 92 feet wide. The depth at each end was 3' 6". and at the centre 9' 6". It was capable of holding 640,000 gallons of water which was heated to not less than 76 degrees.*

*There were two diving stages and two water chutes in addition to two childrens' paddling pools.*

*The whole was lighted at dusk by overhead and under-water floodlighting, whilst a 12 feet glass screen protected the bathers and up to 5,000 spectators, accommodated on terraced or tiered seating.*

*The baths cost £25,000. Adults were admitted for 6d and children for 4d. It was so popular that Mr. Birchall, the secretary, recorded 3,000 bathers through the baths in one day.*

*On the outbreak of World War II, in September 1939, the bath was closed.*

*Later it was used by the A.F.S. and baulks of timber were floated on the water to avoid reflection of light from the moon by the water and white tiles which could have guided enemy aircraft.*

*During the war years mining subsidence, from the High Lane Fault, caused extensive cracks to appear in the bath and the water drained away. Today, blackened and derelict, the bath is empty but for the flotsam and dirt and grime of the Potteries.*